SARAH GERTRUDE MILLIN

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SARAH GERTRUDE MILLIN

ADAM'S REST

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SARAH GERTRUDE MILLIN

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TO THE MEMORY OF MY BROTHER, CAPT. STEPHEN ABRAHAM LIEBSON, M.C., SOUTH AFRICAN MEDICAL CORPS, KILLED AT HENDICOURT, FRANCE, MARCH 22nd, 1918, AGED 28.

ADAM'S REST

It seemed to her sometimes, to Miriam, as she sat there so quietly, her hands in her lap, that she was alone in a great, dim hall. At the end of the hall there was a screen. And across the screen there ran endlessly the story of her life. It was a story that told, not only of things that had happened, but also of things that might have happened, and even of things that never could have happened. It was a story of which she could not understand the meaning, a tale of nothings that swelled into something; of somethings that dwindled into nothing. It was a story without beginning and without end. The story of an Immortal. Of a being persistent on earth, and inevitable. Who had spent days lavishly as if they were inexhaustible. Who had made provision for a never-to-be-ended existence. Who was for ever anticipating, interminably expectant. Who had heard of death, seen it and known it, and yet could not feel that there was such a thing—for herself. . . .

It was an insignificant tale, planned by an anonymous author. But no one knew—or did the author?—how the plot would work out.

She sat motionlessly, her hands restrained, left on right, and watched.

PART I

CHAPTER I

§ 1

THE story went back to childhood.

There were two of them—Miriam and Janet—and they lived in a village in the Cape Colony. The village accompanied the Vaal River along half a mile of its journey, wavered thinly round a little curve, straggled behind in uncertainty, and was lost among a grove of wacht-een-bietje trees. The trees were known as wacht-een-bietje—wait-a-bit—trees because they had long thorns that caught at one and made one stop.

The name of the village was Adam's Rest: not for any biblical reason, but because Adam Kok, the leader of the Griquas (or Bastaards, as the tribe was originally called in delicate reference to its descent from white men and Hottentot women), because Adam Kok was said to have once rested there.

In those days Adam Kok had been a person of some consequence, and his Griquas had owned territories nearly half the size of England. Now Griqualand East and Griqualand West belonged to the Cape Colony, the Griquas had been merged and submerged among the Colonial natives, and no one knew any more why Adam's Rest existed at all. There were a few farms in the neighbourhood, some diamond diggings not far away, and a railway station within reach of a Cape cart. The business part of Adam's Rest consisted of a street, tree-edged, running down the entire length of the village; and the residential quarter consisted of a few isolated houses encroaching amiably on the business part, and of some other houses on the river bank.

At the usually inconvenient distance from the water lived the Kaffirs in their location, a mongrel tribe with a Basuto foundation.

The business part of Adam's Rest was called simply "The Street." It began with a police barracks and a jail and it finished with the Empire Hotel. The Empire Hotel was a low, one-storied building of corrugated iron, and was suffering lately from the competition of the Hotel Victoria, which was newer, and made of brick, and double-storied. The Hotel Victoria stood in the middle of the right side of The Street. Next to the Hotel Victoria was a general store which sold groceries, hardware, soft goods, patent medicines, bread—in short, everything. And next to the general store was a fruit-shop kept by an Indian.

On the opposite side of The Street the court-house confronted the Hotel Victoria. It was made of stone, and had a clock. Alongside the court-house ran "The Road." The Road was as significant in its solitary dignity as The Street, and it led, of course, ultimately to the railway station.

Facing the court-house on The Road was the School. Then came the Post Office. Then a building containing rooms which were occupied by people like the local attorney and the secretary of the school board. Then a few private houses. Then another general store. And then, adjoining the house in which Miriam and Janet lived, appeared diffidently Mr. Lincoln's chemist-shop.

Mr. Lincoln was the father of Miriam and Janet.

§ 2

They had no mother. She had died when Miriam was four and Janet two and a half. But they had an Aunt Laura. Aunt Laura was their mother's sister, and she had once been beautiful. But that was before she had had the accident which had scarred her left cheek and pulled down the lower lid of her left eye so that the inside of the lid showed and the eye itself was unnaturally round and large.

It was that—the accident—which made Aunt Laura prefer to live in Adam's Rest rather than in any other part of the world. She had slipped on a rut in the road, had fallen against a jagged edge in a corrugated iron fence, and straightaway her life as Laura Hemming had ended. She had ceased to be henceforth anything else but just Miriam and Janet's Aunt Laura.

The fact that Aunt Laura's eye was disfigured had never struck Miriam and Janet as a matter of any consequence until one day, after school was out, they had quarrelled with Freddie and Susie Croft. And then, suddenly and simultaneously, Freddie and Susie had made a gesture. They had applied their little brown forefingers to their left eyelids and jerked downwards.

Miriam and Janet had stood staring in shocked silence. Miriam's face was white and Janet's was red. They had gone home without speaking to one another—secretively, as if they were sharing a shame; and when, on their arrival, their Aunt Laura had looked up smiling from the pinafores she was making for them and had greeted them, they could not meet her eyes, and they had mumbled indistinct answers and moved quickly away.

For a long time after that they saw nothing in their Aunt Laura's face but just her left eye. But it was worse for Miriam than for Janet, because things sank deeper into Miriam and stayed longer. For weeks Miriam could not bear to look at her aunt—and yet could not help looking.

§ 3

Ever since she could remember Miriam had known the Crofts and had hated them. It was a feeling as old as civilisation. The Crofts were coloured.

There were four of them, and they lived with their mother in a corrugated house of their own near the river. Their mother was more coloured than they were, and it followed obviously that their father must have been more white. In fact, altogether white, for degrees of colour nearly always seemed to arrange themselves in a logical progression. But Miriam had never seen Mr. Croft. He did not now live in Adam's Rest.

The young Crofts were not all the same colour either. Some were darker than others. The eldest, Henry, approximated to his mother. The two youngest, Freddie and Susie, were not far from being as white as Southern Europeans. The girl following Henry, Carrie, had the lightest skin of all of them, pale eyes, and even freckles; but unfortunately her hair failed her. Although it was a medium brown, it was the fuzzy hair of the first mixed generation.

Of the four Crofts three went to school. Henry, the eldest, had been considered by the school authorities too dark to go to a white school. In consequence, his education had stopped at the ability to write his name and to make figures, and he had gone to work at an early age. At a time when Susie was with Miriam in the second standard, Henry was working at the Hotel Victoria. He drove the hotel cart and helped in the stable.

The Crofts had a peculiar position in Adam's Rest. To begin with, every one knew them. They were among the oldest inhabitants. In the early days there had been only a few white people living in the midst of thousands of natives, and every person not actually black had counted. There was no shirking their existence now. Then there were other factors, too. Mrs. Croft, for all her brown skin, and her hair like corrugated black wire, was a capable sick-nurse, and was often called in to assist at the birth of babies. That gave her a kind of social foothold. She would lean over garden gates and inquire about the health of patients and children; would stop perambulators and prod fat young cheeks; would come round with home-made boer-meal bread, preserved peaches or naartjes, perhaps a pair of little socks.

She would penetrate into the living-room, and, one thing leading to another, would sit down and fall into comfortable gossip, while she sipped a cup of tea. She would lend her aid at the cutting out of a blouse or a pinafore. . . . She would call again. . . .

The three Croft children who went to school had a social faculty, too—they liked to link arms with their white class-mates, to accompany them to their homes, to play with them, and, chiefly, to be seen doing it all.

They had the greatest contempt for children more coloured than they were. They had almost black cousins in the Kaffir location to whom they did not speak.

From babyhood they had instinctively grappled on to the white tradition.

CHAPTER II

§ I

NEVER, during their young years, did Miriam and Janet solidly realise their father. He wandered like a shadow past their daily comings and goings. He had grayish hair, grayish eyes, a grayish skin. He wore grayish clothes.

He used to wake up very early in the morning and go for a walk along the river. At breakfast he used to smile his quiet smile and say, "Well, children?" They hardly spoke to him after that until the evening.

He spent all his days—even his Sundays—in and about the chemist shop. It was not a very busy shop, but he kept himself mildly occupied filling little bottles with liquids and little papers with powders. He did everything very slowly and carefully. And when there were no more bottles and papers to be filled, and no rare customers to be served, he slowly and carefully read books on historical subjects. He liked particularly the time of the old Romans; and Miriam always saw him on the screen of her subconsciousness as a small, thin, elderly man, with a tuft of soft gray hair brushed back from his forehead; a small, straggly, gray moustache; glasses low down on his nose; and his coat off (because it was generally so hot at Adam's Rest): she saw him sitting on the verandah outside his shop on a deck-chair, and reading some such work as Gibbon's

Decline and Fall. There were three stone steps leading up to the verandah, and his background was the whitewashed wall of the shop.

There was no doubt that he must have spoken quite often, but Miriam could not, when she was away from him, remember the sound of his voice, and very few things that he had ever said.

It was a fact that, from the day he came to Adam's Rest until the day he died, he never left it. He had never been farther from the village than the station. He had never, since his arrival there, actually sat in a train. He had not gone half a mile beyond the opposite bank of the river. He had not passed the grove of wacht-een-bietjes that marked the end of Adam's Rest on the right, nor, on the left, the waterfall which, during still nights, murmured in their ears.

The same peculiar kind of philosophical indolence that had brought him to Adam's Rest, kept him there.

Once Miriam had asked her aunt about him, about his youth. Had he always been so quiet? Always liked so much to be alone?

"Oh, no."

"What then?"

"He used to care for things that don't seem to interest him now. Jokes, and games, and music. He used to be clever in rather a different sort of way. We all thought him very witty."

"Has he given up jokes and games and music because he's old?"

Aunt Laura smiled dimly. Was her brother-in-law old? Then, perhaps, in the sight of Miriam, she was old too.

"Or was it because mother died?"

"Perhaps. I don't quite know. I think he simply got out of the habit. . . . I am getting out of the habit too." She sighed. Her life had promised differently.

Miriam looked at her aunt with wide, anxious eyes. "And I?" she asked. "Will I get out of the habit?"

"Heaven forbid," said Aunt Laura.

§ 2

The difference between the two sisters was marked from early childhood. Miriam's attitude, even at the age of ten, was one of a restrained voluptuousness, diversified by bursts of deliberate asceticism. For instance, if they were given sweets, Janet would eat hers at once, but Miriam would deliberately, and quite purposelessly, deny herself the enjoyment. She would decide to do something else first. She would count a hundred, or she would run round the house, or she would finish her school-work, or she would simply put them away out of sight. When, finally, she began to eat them, she would do so in an inverted order of merit. The worst first, the best last. The probabilities were that, by the time she had arrived at the height of desire, surfeited appetite had taken away from it all attraction.

Or, again, it might happen that Janet, having finished her own, would come begging from Miriam. Then Miriam would look resentfully from her sister to the sweets she had kept for the delight of anticipation. She would hesitate, and, inevitably, she would thrust them at her: "Here you are. Take them. Take them all. Greedy little pig."

Janet would eat the sweets with calm enjoyment, and Miriam would stand looking at her with a kind of satisfied hatred.

But often she denied herself things merely for the exultation denial gave her. She would secretly refrain from eating her favourite pudding; she would wear her ugliest dress; she would hide away a story whose end she craved to know; she would be pleasant to people she hated; she would give her pocket-money to Janet.

She would set herself tasks. She would skip a certain number of times, and skip one added time every day for a month. If she tripped, she had to begin again from the beginning. The end of the day's trial often left her in tears. She would do the same with swimming, or even with brushing her hair. One added stroke every day. She would walk down the street with her eyes closed. She would determine to get from one place to another in a certain number of steps. To hit a tin from a longer distance than ever before. To learn a piece of poetry in a given time. To practise so many scales during the day. To do a most disagreeable amount of sewing. . . .

She would count ten before speaking. She had once read that it was a desirable thing to do for people who had a hasty disposition. And when her Aunt Laura asked her a question, she would look at her mutely, and slowly count ten to herself before answering, while her aunt demanded impatiently why she stood there dreaming. . . .

As regards all these tasks—if she did not do them, Something would happen. She did not know what—

had never attempted to define it—but Something vague and big.

Always Miriam was waiting for something to happen.

§ 3

Miriam was a romantic. She was never simply Miriam Lincoln, Joseph Lincoln the chemist's daughter; a small, thin girl with a short eager face; tumbled fair hair; wide gray eyes, black-lashed and black-browed; a peeling nose; and a sunburnt, freckled skin. Even if she conceded that she was Miriam Lincoln of Adam's Rest, she repudiated the idea that she was merely what other people thought her to be. She felt herself charged with hidden potentialities.

She saw herself in many guises. . . .

She was Miriam Lincoln, the great tragic actress. So tragic that she had but to stand on the stage and turn her wonderful sad face on the audience for every one to be moved almost to tears. It would haunt them for days afterwards—her face. Such things had happened before.

Then she was Miriam Lincoln, the great poetess. The children in schools had to learn her poetry. She thought out rhymes in her head. It was quite simple. One chose a word, and one traced the rhymes to it in alphabetical order. Having done that, all one had to do was to fit in the ideas that went with the words. For instance, River. Well, giver, quiver, shiver—all very appropriate. . . . Day. There were lots of words that went with Day: bay, fay, gay, hay, jay. . . .

She was also Miriam Lincoln, the Good. She had a million pounds. Of this she set aside a hundred thousand pounds each for herself, her father, her aunt, and her sister. That was for safety. One never knew when one might not be confronted with destitution oneself. The other six hundred thousand pounds she distributed among the poor. Every day, until the money was exhausted, she took a hundred pounds and went into the slums of London (Miriam was greatly interested in the slums of London), and helped pathetic and deserving cases. People blessed her as she passed gravely along her path of charity.

Sometimes she saved lives. She jumped into rivers, flung herself before wild horses, rushed into burning buildings. She even sacrificed her own life occasionally. . . .

But there was another phase. And now she was Miriam Lincoln, superbly tall, with high-massed golden hair, deep violet eyes and a flawless complexion. She wore a ruby-coloured velvet dress with a long train and she was the adored of all the world. Every man who saw her fell in love with her. In the end she had to marry one of them, but it was difficult to make a selection.

She called them in review before her—the best there were. They stood next to one another in a long line, and she examined them, her ruby-coloured velvet dress trailing behind her as she walked up and down.

First of all, she excluded all the very dark men. "They might have coloured blood in them, for all you know," she told herself with the caution of experience. Then she cast out any man under six feet.

By a process of elimination the choice was narrowed down to three. And these three she set a task, in the manner approved in fairy tales. It was hard to think out a satisfactory test. "If . . ." It had to be some supreme test. She wrinkled her forehead. "If . . ."

"Miriam," Janet would call suddenly. "Let's play visiting. I'll be Aunt Laura, and you can be the postmaster's wife."

Miriam looked at her sister with a hauteur born of her high-massed golden hair and violet eyes and ruby velvet gown. The postmaster's wife! Visiting! How Janet spoiled everything! But it was always like that. A person could not even think in peace.

CHAPTER III

§ 1

THE years passed slowly. They went from the eighteen eighties into the eighteen nineties. Miriam was ten, she was eleven, she was twelve. Nothing changed.

Then, one day, as school-time approached, Miriam took a book, and went to sit under the pepper tree in the back-yard.

"Miriam," her aunt called.

She did not answer.

"It's time to go," her aunt reminded her.

Miriam read on with great deliberation.

"Do you hear me, Miriam?"

There was an urgent note in Aunt Laura's voice.

"Yes," Miriam answered sullenly.

"Then why do you sit there like that?"

"I want to."

Her aunt walked up to her. Miriam's face was white. She was struggling for words.

"I'm not going to that school any more," she whispered finally.

"Why? Tell me, Miriam. What has happened?"

"I'm not going to a school where they have coloured children."

"Is that all?" Aunt Laura asked blankly.

"All?" Miriam repeated, and burst into tears.

She stood up suddenly and flung her book away.

"I hate them, the Crofts. I hate them. They're bad. And Freddie Croft"—she stopped, stumbled on—"Freddie Croft, he wanted to kiss me."

"Oh," said Aunt Laura.

"And now I've told you," said Miriam, and rushed away.

Aunt Laura looked after her with worried eyes. What was she to do? She understood Miriam's disgust. Poor Miriam!

Her brother was sitting on the verandah, a heavy volume on his lap. She felt nervous about approaching him. She had lived in his house—had seen him daily—for eight years, and she had never said an intimate thing to him, had never attempted to penetrate his spiritual defences, had no faintest clue to his thoughts and feelings.

He looked up as she came near him, smiled, looked down at his book again, and went on reading. He made it very difficult.

She leaned against the verandah rail, and stared down The Street. A wagon, laden with wood, and drawn by sixteen oxen, was making its slow way towards The Road. Under the hood sat a woman—a Boer woman—with a child on her lap. There were other children under the hood also. That was how they lived: Under the hood of the wagon. On the road.

Her husband was walking alongside the wagon, cracking his whip, and shouting to the oxen.

He flicked them with his whip. "Hi, julle bliksems, ik zul julle opdonner!"

Through her perplexity, Aunt Laura smiled. "Hi, you lightnings, I'll thunder you up!"

She watched the wagon turn into The Road.

"Joseph," she said suddenly.

He raised his head.

"I've been speaking to Miriam——" She stopped.

"Yes?"

"She refuses to go to school."

Mr. Lincoln closed his book.

"I see."

There was silence for a moment. "Why?" he asked.

"On account of the Crofts." The red ran up Aunt Laura's face. The circumstances of her life had made her very shy of certain things. She dreaded to say her next words. "The boy—Fred Croft—wanted to kiss her."

She looked away, back into the street.

Presently Mr. Lincoln's dry voice came to her ears.

"Miriam is quite right. . . . Both the girls shall go to boarding-school." He cleared his throat. "I—like the girl," he said. "She has spirit."

§ 2

For the first time since Miriam could remember, her father went as far as the station. He put them into the train—the two girls in homespun dresses made by Aunt Laura—and kissed them good-bye gravely. All her life Miriam saw, as in a picture, her father and Aunt Laura—her father, with his grayish, wrinkled face; her Aunt Laura, tall, with brown hair and dark blue eyes like Janet's, a handsome figure of a woman, with her scarred left cheek and too-round eye; standing on the station, and watching the train as it turned the corner.

There were a few lonely wacht-een-bietje trees near the station, and under one of the trees stood the Cape cart they had come in; the horses very still, with their heads almost touching the ground; a little Kaffir on the seat, loosely holding the drooping reins.

There were other people on the station, too, but they hardly touched Miriam's consciousness. She was realising something actively for the first time. She loved her father. Aunt Laura, too—she had always been so good to them; but chiefly, for some dim, inexplicable reason, her little, thin, gray father.

CHAPTER IV

§ 1

LOOKING back on her boarding-school life Miriam saw mainly a blur. Girls—lots of girls, all kinds of girls—with their arms round one another, giggling, whispering, shouting, weeping. . . . A few years after she had left school she had forgotten their very names—most of them.

But there were some things which she never afterwards forgot. Things insignificant and even ridiculous, which, at the time, had overwhelmed her with sorrow and bitterness. There was, for instance, a little episode that happened in her very first week at school. She was reading away complacently when, suddenly, every one, all the girls, and even the teacher, burst into a shout of laughter. She looked up, startled. Looked down again. Realised what had happened. She had pronounced "misled" as if it were the past tense of the verb "to misle." It had seemed to her quite a natural and effective term. But now she saw what the word really was. Her voice grew husky with shame and embarrassment, but she stumbled on, her face pale and her heart thumping, until she came to the word "amends." She hesitated, opened her mouth, stammered, desperately ventured on "almonds." . . . Renewed laughter; excessive, delighted merriment.

She sat down in her seat, very straight; and, all at once, tears of humiliation rushed uncontrollably from her heart to her throat, to her eyes, down her cheeks. She heard herself sobbing, gulping. One of the bigger girls took her outside, gave her some water, washed her face. . . . For days afterwards she could not meet her schoolfellows with serenity.

It was Janet who first pointed out to her that they were not fashionably dressed. "We look countrified, Miriam," she complained. "All the girls have better clothes than we have."

"They haven't," said Miriam.

"They have," said Janet.

"Well, even if they have, I don't care," said Miriam.

But it was a lie. She cared very much. She wanted exceedingly to be beautiful. When the girls said to her, "Which would you rather be, clever or beautiful?" she always said "clever." But that again was not true. She would so much rather be beautiful than anything else in the world, that she could not bear to admit it. Sometimes she looked at herself in the looking-glass, and it seemed to her that, with a little luck—if she lost her freckles, and did her hair very becomingly, and tried not to smile all over her face—it seemed to her that she might one day become beautiful.

But, at other times, she knew positively that she was irremediably ugly. Everything in her face was wrong: her mouth, her skin, her nose, her eyes. She only had good teeth, that was all. And what was the use of good teeth with nothing else? She smiled bitterly to think that, five years ago, in her early youth, she had had visions of herself as a tall, beautiful lady, with golden hair and violet eyes (violet eyes! Good Heavens, the imbecility, violet eyes!), and a ruby velvet dress with a long train. She would be satisfied now if she merely grew up so that people were not repelled by her ugliness. What if she never found any one to marry her!

It was an appalling thought. All the girls had already decided about the kind of men they would like to marry. Most of the girls wanted rich, handsome men. But a few romantics wanted poor, wicked men, so that they might reclaim them.

In the meantime, they were interested in boys a year or two older than themselves. They showed one another—in great secrecy—keepsakes, letters, photographs.

It all made Miriam very jealous. She had no keepsakes or letters or photographs. She did not particularly want them. But she hated to have nothing to talk about, nothing to exhibit. It humiliated her. She was nearly fifteen now, and no one had ever admired her, while Janet, even Janet, had a boy who wrote to her from Grahamstown, and had given her the half of a sixpence.

Another humiliation was that Janet was growing to be taller than she was. Miriam felt that in view of her greater age she ought to be, in every respect, Janet's superior—cleverer, stronger, bigger, handsomer. And here was Janet—not only did she have no freckles, not only were her eyes such a deep blue that they approximated to Miriam's coveted violet; but she could run faster and jump higher; she was taller and better developed; she was popular; she had letters from Grahamstown and the half of a sixpence.

§ 2

There were times when Miriam seriously thought of becoming a Catholic and taking the veil. The world had renounced her; she would renounce the world. She would wear voluminous black draperies, and that white starched thing round her face. She would exhaust herself body and soul doing good on earth, and people would look at her spiritualised, emaciated face and say, "There's a history behind that."

She would die young, of course. Consumption, perhaps. Or sucking diphtheria stuff out of a poor child's throat. . . . Or an epidemic, a plague. No one would venture to go among the sick and dying except herself. She would go—calmly, fearlessly. But, in the end, it would cost her her life.

When she came back for the holidays Aunt Laura said: "You've been working too hard, Miriam. We must feed you up. Plenty of milk—six cups a day at least. And an iron tonic. Don't pull a face. I've kept the best for the last. It's a surprise."

"What?" asked Miriam, without much animation. She knew these surprises. No one need think she had any illusions left about life in general.

"Come along," said Aunt Laura. "I'll show you." And led her into the yard, and opened a door—the stable door.

"Oh, is that mine? My horse?" shrieked Miriam, leaping forward.

§ 3

When Miriam was seventeen, she left school for good. She felt herself to be very mature, but it seemed to her at the same time that no one understood her—her inward yearnings and strivings, the mysterious quality of her being. Even her music master at school, he had most reprehensibly told her that her face was like a flower, and that he could not sleep at night for thinking of it; he had dedicated a waltz of his own composition to her; he had spoken nervously of love and marriage; but even he did not understand her. In any case, it would not have been of any great consequence if he had. He was too old—thirty-five at least; his hair was thin; and he had a look in his eyes—an eager, appealing look—which annoyed her. For these defects, in combination with the fact that he loved her, Miriam despised him.

And then, chiefly, there was that affair of the school concert, which he had arranged, against him. Miriam had no particular talent for the piano, but it was her last term at school, and the unfortunate man was anxious to please her—in short, Miriam was set down to play a solo at the concert.

Miriam had never played in public before; she was delighted, exhilarated. She could hardly think or talk of anything else. She enchanted Mr. Gifford with her bright humour.

For three months she practised the piano two hours a day, six days in the week. At the end of the third month, she could play her piece, not only from memory, but with her eyes shut. She could play it at any kind of speed, and she could play it through twice running without a mistake. She never now rose from her music stool without doing so. If she stumbled or played a wrong note, she stopped immediately at whatever stage of the composition she might be, and began again from the beginning. It was a renewal of her old childhood's habit of setting herself a task and sternly completing it. . . . She was very proud of herself, and Mr. Gifford was very complimentary.

Then, in the fourth month, she broke down as she was playing a left-hand run. It was a phrase that had never given her trouble before. She went back to the beginning light-heartedly, but, to her surprise, found herself stumbling again at the same place. It happened a third time, too. . . . But the fourth time she ran safely past the critical spot, and finished the piece faultlessly—at any rate, as far as the notes were concerned.

She sighed with relief. She had broken the evil spell. She set to eagerly to repeat the achievement, very wary of the risky place. So intent was she on not making the same mistake again, so nervous was she in approaching it, that this time she broke down two lines before. Now everything went wrong. She played the thing again and again, played it angrily and recklessly, with ground teeth, her body taut with nervous passion, her head throbbing. She would not leave it without playing it twice through correctly. She would not. She would not.

The gong went. It was tea-time. She had to go with her pledge to herself unfulfilled. She could eat nothing. Was afraid to speak for fear of bursting into tears.

She approached her music next day with fear and hatred, practised the offending bars twenty times before beginning the piece as a whole. Then, playing more slowly than usual, she finished it twice without a fault, and left it, relieved and thankful.

For a week all went well. And then, three days before the concert, the old trouble reasserted itself. By the day of the concert she had not yet recovered her mastery of that left-hand run. She went on to the platform in her unbecoming pale-pink schoolgirl dress, her face white, her eyes misty, her knees trembling. A voice within some distant self of hers told her to bow to the audience. She made a quick gesture with her head, and went to the piano, stumbling as she approached the stool. She felt a curious emptiness inside as if her stomach had suddenly disappeared.

She plunged immediately into the opening bars, struck the keys mechanically, not hearing the notes. About half-way through she came to herself, and began to realise what it was she was doing. Now a sensation of triumph and ease was on her, she knew she could do anything with the piano. She negotiated the rebellious left-hand run with contempt, and continued magnificently to a crashing end. She had played the piece without a mistake. Now she felt that she would like to play to that audience all night. But she knew that even one encore was not permitted—the programme was already formidably long. She hurried off the stage, heard clapping, came back and bowed—she had been told to bow at the edge of the platform, but dared not go so conspicuously far. The audience clapped again—not so much as the first time though. The clapping ceased as by a spontaneous inspiration. She was off the platform . . . a red-headed girl without eyebrows was nervously tuning a violin where a moment before she herself had stood.

As soon as she could Miriam made her way to the front bench reserved for the performers. She was exultant. She wanted to talk about her playing. "Was I all right?" she whispered eagerly. "Fine," whispered back the girl sitting next to her. "Sh!" said the principal of the school, indicating the girl on the platform.

But presently it was the interval, and the performers gathered together, discussing their platform sensations. Now they were all hungry for appreciation; and each praised the other lavishly, luring praise in return.

They were all happy, the evening was theirs.

Next morning, before dawn, Miriam was awake. She wanted to see what the critic had said about her in the morning's paper. She searched all over. She could find no notice. At last she saw a little paragraph saying that the criticism of the students' concert of the previous evening was unavoidably held over until next day owing to pressure on the paper's space.

A blankness fell on Miriam. She was unbearably disappointed, bitterly indignant. Their concert had been crowded out as a matter of no importance . . . crowded out.

She felt, all at once, tired and disheartened. Perhaps it was a matter of no importance. . . . Yes, she saw now that their concert was a matter of no importance.

She threw her mind back over the last few months.

How many hours had she given to that wretched piece? Fifteen weeks, six days a week, two hours a day, either at it or round it. She had lost appetite and flesh, she had lost patience and ease of mind, through that piece. It had filled her thoughts and worried her nerves, and disturbed her nights.

And all for what? To sit for ten minutes on a platform, and play deafly and blindly—as if she were a musical box—to a perfunctory and indifferent audience, who, out of kindness, had graciously clapped their hands, so that she might come back and jerk her head at them. However, and whatever she had done, the applause would have been of more or less the same quality. Indeed, if she had played really very badly, they would, out of courtesy and pity, have been, if anything, rather more determined in their appreciation.

Miriam felt completely disillusioned. "Fool!" she taunted herself. "Fool!"

Mr. Gifford came to her, smiling his usual appeal.

"Well, the concert was a great success, wasn't it?"

"Was it?" said Miriam with a new cold sureness of herself. (A teacher! But he would not teach Miriam Lincoln again. How had he dared to expose her to this humiliation!)

"You played beautifully," he maintained, with beaming fatuousness.

Never in her life had Miriam hated any one—not even the Crofts—as at this moment she hated the misguided music master. She felt as if he were to blame for everything, for the whole wasteful futility of the last four months.

She stared at him with obtrusive contempt.

"I was very proud of you," he added.

Nothing, at this moment, could so have revolted Miriam as his doglike eyes and the tenderness in his voice. Nausea swelled out her hatred for him. Her tones were dry as if her emotion were a block of wood in her throat.

"I don't know why you were so proud," she said. "I played abominably, and so did we all."

His face went white. She saw his hands tremble. He could not reply to her. He began to walk away.

His silence abashed her. She took a step after him.

"Mr. Gifford," she said. "Oh, Mr. Gifford, I'm sorry. I don't really think we were all so bad. I know the trouble you took. It isn't your fault I'm unmusical."

The soft, fluttering youth in her voice moved him irresistibly. He melted towards her again, and, in doing so, renewed her sense of repulsion. She muttered—she hardly knew what—edged away, and escaped.

The paper said next morning that Miss Miriam Lincoln had played very creditably.

§ 4

When Miriam came home, she made half-confidences to Aunt Laura, asked her questions, hoped for confidences in return. But there were some facts which, in view of Aunt Laura's scarred face and disfigured eye, one might not discuss—unanswered problems that rose up like a barrier between them. She fancied romantically that there had been a man—a love affair—before the accident. . . .

It was only in later years that Miriam began to understand how that accident which had scarred Aunt Laura's face, had scarred also, not only her life, but even her soul. There were things she could not discuss normally. Physical beauty, for instance. Love. Sex. She viewed with abhorrence the manifestations of sex, and regarded all men with suspicion.

She looked on life as a penance. "How long life is," she had once said to Miriam. "I'm so healthy. I feel as if I could live for ever. It frightens me—it frightens me—when I think of the years to be got through."

CHAPTER V

§ 1

In Adams' Rest life was moving on. There was a new shop in The Street. A Jew had it. The Empire Hotel, which had been going backwards for years, had been sold. The man who bought it was a hustler, and had added a billiard saloon. He was, one could not help noticing, taking away custom from the Hotel Victoria. The schoolhouse had been considerably enlarged. There had been a row of pepper trees planted on each side of The Road. Young Conrad Hugo (the Hugos had been settled for two generations on their farm, Hugo's Geluk—Hugo's Happiness) had gone to Edinburgh to study medicine. That was a great event in the history of Adam's Rest. No one belonging to Adam's Rest had ever before gone across the water to study. Though, of course, if any one could do it, it was a Hugo. The Hugos had one of the richest farms in the district. When the first Hugo had settled there, he had owned the whole of twenty thousand morgen—forty-two thousand acres. For fifty years he had lived there patriarchally, with children and grandchildren. But the family had proved too prolific. When old Grandfather Hugo had died, the farm had been divided among his four sons. Each one had built himself a house on his section of land and settled there with his family. Now, counting wives and children, there were twenty-one

Hugos on the soil that had been one man's farm. The farm could not go on being subdivided indefinitely, and the younger generation was beginning to strike out in other directions. So Conrad was now in Edinburgh, and next year his younger brother, Adrian, was going to Cambridge to study law.

There was a general spirit of advancement in the air. Even the Crofts had a share in it. They were rising socially. Carrie Croft, the freckled one with the fuzzy hair, had married a white policeman—her baby had blue eyes and straight hair. Freddie was working in a shop, and Susie was engaged to be married to Mr. Maxwell, a man so nearly white that he counted as being altogether white.

Only poor Henry, the eldest, had smudged the family escutcheon. The worst of it was that he had always been regarded as the quiet, thrifty one. His manner was grave, he talked seldom. He had from boyhood had an aptitude for carpentering. He did odd mending jobs after working hours, even made furniture. . . . Mrs. Croft's house was full of his contrivances, and the people in Adam's Rest were beginning to buy his chairs and tables and cupboards. He saved all the money he earned, put it pound by pound in the bank. Although he was the brownest of the Crofts, his brothers and sisters yielded him the respect to which his financial solidity entitled him.

And he, of all people, had been overtaken and betrayed by love; and, as far as he was concerned, all Mr. Croft's efforts to provide Mrs. Croft with near-European descendants had been thrown away. At the Hotel Victoria, where Henry was working, there was a thin, slatternly, light-coloured native girl, who acted negligently as housemaid. Henry had chosen to fall in love with her, and he had followed her to the location, and built himself, on the edge of the location, a little square, two-roomed mud-house, and there they lived together and produced children very nearly as brown as any in the location.

That meant, of course, that he was an outcast from his family. None of the other Crofts spoke to him. His name was not mentioned among them. For twenty years they had maintained that they were as good as any white people, and now Henry had done this thing. It was not even as if it were a casual affair. His action was deliberate and definite and permanent. Henry had returned to the fold of his maternal ancestors.

It almost ruined the prestige of the Crofts in Adam's Rest. After all, there was Carrie with her white policeman and her white baby—Mrs. Lowe, if you please, with her decent house and her Kaffir servant. There was Freddie, working at Redford's store, going to dances in the schoolroom, dancing with his white schoolmates of earlier years. There was Susie, engaged to her so nearly white man. There was old Mrs. Croft, very respectable, and assisting white babies into the world. She was brown, certainly, but still, she *kept* herself white. . . .

And now, suddenly, there was Henry with his Kaffir wife, and his two little Kaffir babies, woefully dirty and bedraggled; and the prospect of many more of them.

Trouble almost came of the affair one night. It was New Year's Eve and everybody was getting comfortably drunk. Freddie, altogether the gentleman, was drinking in the white bar. Poor Henry, humbly accepting his lowered status, was drinking in the black bar. The clock struck twelve, the New Year was ushered in, the doors were closed, and the two brothers left to go home. One came out of the white bar, the other came out of the black bar, and they met face to face.

They stopped still and looked at one another with bloodshot eyes. For a moment neither of them spoke. And then Freddie said hoarsely: "You get out of my way there."

"Who you ordering about?" Henry retorted truculently.

"I'm ordering you about," said Freddie, his voice rising. "Kaffir!"

Henry stiffened his swaying body.

"What you calling me?" he demanded.

"I'm calling you Kaffir. I'll say it again. Kaffir!"

Without warning Henry fell on Freddie. He was older and heavier, and bore Freddie to the ground. Other men, on their way home, too, ran up and separated them.

"What's the row?"

Henry, in the grip of restraining arms, collapsed suddenly, and began to weep.

Freddie leaned against the wooden post of the verandah, gasping. He pointed a shaking finger at Henry.

"Look at him," he sobbed. "Look at him. He's spoilt the name. He's spoilt the bloody name!"

§ 2

At first Miriam found it a happy thing to be home again. Here she had her father and her aunt as a background, but there was no deliberate supervision. There were no rules and restrictions. And, principally, there were no lessons; the drudgery of study was over; the preparatory period of life was past.

It was the beginning of the year and summertime. In Adam's Rest that meant a temperature of something like a hundred degrees in the shade. At night they all, Mr. Lincoln and Aunt Laura and Miriam, slept under the wide pepper-tree in the back-yard. The crickets shrilled unceasingly; the frogs croaked; from the location came the faint, far-away sound of the singing and dancing of Kaffirs; and from the river, sobered by distance, the cadenced murmur of the waterfall. After midnight a little breeze sprang up.

At six o'clock in the morning the sun was high, and the world awake. Then Chrissie, the Kaffir maid, brought them coffee, and Mr. Lincoln went into the house to dress. But Aunt Laura and Miriam hurried across in their dressing-gowns to the river and had a swimming race. It was the only time during the waking day that Aunt Laura forgot completely the circumstances of her life. Then a note would creep into her voice, a lilt would sail into her laugh, that taught Miriam a new thing. Youth, then, died hard!

In her childhood Miriam had divided the ages of man arithmetically. If threescore years and ten was the full span of life, then, literally, at thirty-five one was middle-aged. It did not work out that way according to conventional standards. Say one divided life into three equal compartments: youth, middle age, and age. Then one was young for twenty-three and a third years; one was middle-aged for the next twenty-three and a third years—that is, till one was forty-six and two-thirds years: and, after that, one was old. Yet no one ever spoke of a person of twenty-four as being middle-aged. Women of twenty-four referred to themselves as girls! That annoyed Miriam. She considered it an affectation of the prerogatives of youth. For her part, she had determined that when she got to that age, she would put aside the irresponsibilities of girlhood. She would live soberly, with dignity.

Of course, here in Adam's Rest it was not as, for instance, in Cape Town. In Adam's Rest the women aged early, without a struggle. They were mature by the time they were fifteen; almost invariably they were married before twenty. And, within a few years of their marriage, their youth, wilting in the heat of the sun which had forced it to bloom too early, crushed by the inanities of village life, the complacencies of matrimony, the burdens of maternity, was dead. Girls a few years senior to Miriam in her school-days at Adam's Rest, were already established matrons—thin and wizened, coarse and stout, according to their natures and circumstances. . . .

This year the heat at Adam's Rest was excessive. The freshness of the early morning swim lasted only until breakfast at eight o'clock. During the rest of the day clothing and movement became intolerable, and were reduced to a minimum.

In a deck-chair on the back verandah Miriam sat all day long and read novels. Sometimes, on moonlight nights, she rode the horse which had been her father's present to her two years before.

§ 3

A year ran away, a year so empty and unproductive, that it left no record on Miriam's mind. It was as if there had been written between acts the words: "A year has passed."

Miriam was tired of reading, tired of idling, tired even of riding about by herself.

She put the matter formally to her father.

"I want to go away from Adam's Rest."

"I see," he said. It was an expression he used habitually. It meant, "I am listening sympathetically. Tell me all about it."

"There's nothing for me to do here."

Mr. Lincoln remained silent. Miriam went on.

"I want to be some use in the world."

"Yes," said Mr. Lincoln. "Yes."

"I want to feel I'm alive. I've wasted a whole year in Adam's Rest. I can't go on like this."

"What would you like to do?" her father asked, a little helplessly. "Would you like to qualify as a teacher?"

Miriam shook her head. "No. I should hate to teach the same things to children of the same age year after year. Push them up into higher standards, see them leave school and go out into the world, and stay in one place myself all the time." Her swift mind flew to a simile. "Look, father." She pointed her finger unconsciously at her mental vision. "A teacher is like a sign-post. It points the way to others, but remains stationary itself. . . . I don't want to be a teacher, father."

"Do you feel you have a particular gift for anything else?" asked Mr. Lincoln.

"I could study to be a doctor," said Miriam.

Mr. Lincoln smiled. "I'm afraid I can't afford that. It would mean your going to England. I am not a rich man, Miriam."

"Then what is going to happen to me?" cried Miriam.

"One day, I hope, you will marry, and find new interests in life."

"And I must sit and wait for that! Sit and *wait!*"

Mr. Lincoln closed the book that had been lying face open on his knee. For an instant, Miriam saw him as an entity apart from his dim paternal relation to her. Saw, too, that, for him, as well as for her, the passing years had a meaning. He was grayer, more lined. He looked tired. He was getting old, she realised with a pang.

"I understand you, Miriam," he said, as if illuminating her thought. "Once I was young, too. I also wanted and demanded. But I have had to give in. I don't say it has been as hard for me as if I had naturally had a more energetic temperament. Still, I've been through it. And, after all, I see now that there are many ways of living. When one is young one thinks that action is life. But when one grows old one understands that only the anticipation and realisation of action is life."

"Then you must have something to anticipate or to realise," Miriam protested. "What is there to think about in Adam's Rest?"

"That depends on yourself. You might find that Adam's Rest stands for the whole world. I have lived in London, Miriam, and I have lived in Adam's Rest. And I have discovered them to be surprisingly alike. At this very moment I expect there is some daughter worrying her father in London (poor man!) about what she should do with herself."

"And getting the same good advice, perhaps," said Miriam, with a little laugh.

Mr. Lincoln smiled at her. He never raised his voice in laughter.

"So, you see," he went on, "I live in Adam's Rest and read history. And I find that, actually, the physical geographies are right. The world goes round, and not, as we sometimes think, forward. It seems to be progressing, and yet it always comes back to the same place. And what is more, we're all going round the same way together. London, and Adam's Rest too."

He stopped. Looked shyly at his daughter. "If you like," he said, "we might read History together."

§ 4

When Janet returned from school for the last time she found Miriam technically grown up. Her abundant, wavy fair hair was swathed round her head, and it gave her an air of coronetted dignity. She was prettier, too, than she ever had been. She had lost most of her freckles. Her face, wistful in repose, grew alight with animation as soon as she spoke. Her clear voice was full of lovely inflections. Nowadays, when she met any of the Crofts, they called her Miss Lincoln, and no longer Miriam. They told themselves that they were as good as any white person, but, except Carrie, they dared not always assert the fact.

Carrie, however, with her policeman and her blue-eyed baby, thought herself the social equal of any one in Adam's Rest. She came to call on Miriam and Janet. Miriam felt constrained by the consideration of Carrie's antecedents, but could be nothing except agreeable to a visitor. "As a matter of fact," Janet pointed out to Miriam afterwards, "if we hadn't known that Carrie was coloured we should have thought her quite pleasant and well-mannered. She speaks and behaves exactly as any white person in Adam's Rest does. What is there about being coloured that is wrong in itself?"

"There must be something wrong at bottom. Look at their ancestry. It means a bad type of white man and a bad type of black woman to begin with. You know yourself, Janet, decent Kaffir women have nothing to do with white men. So that's one thing. Besides, it doesn't matter what it is. I can't work it out, but I have a feeling about colour as if it were a catching disease—perhaps it is—and I don't want to be near it."

It was this feeling more than anything else which excluded Miriam from a number of social doings at Adam's Rest—picnics, concerts, dances. Janet had no such prejudices. She grasped at every opportunity for amusement, possessed a vivid capacity for enjoyment, knew no restraint in her demands. She was able to persuade herself about anything she wanted, that, not only would she like to have it, it was her positive duty to have it.

As greedily as in her babyhood she had eaten sweets, so greedily now did she snatch at Life itself.

CHAPTER VI

§ 1

THE South African War that closed the old century and opened the new broke out when Miriam was nearly twenty-three, and Janet twenty-one.

Five men from Adam's Rest joined the forces; among them Carrie's husband. And Carrie and her children (there were now three of them) went to live with her mother.

The Boers lay around Ladysmith and Mafeking and Kimberley. They rode into Adam's Rest.

That was all that happened. A party of bearded and shabby horsemen, in corduroys and veldschoens, sitting slack in their saddles, chatting good-humouredly with one another and any of the passers-by whom they saw, entered Adam's Rest. They took over the Court and offices, proclaimed Adam's Rest to be part of the Dutch Republic, made a levy on the inhabitants of whatever contributions they chose to give—a few pounds, clothing, food; and settled down in sleepy administration of their new domain.

They rested there peacefully for a few months, and grew sleek. They worried no one, and no one worried them. Then one day the rumour went round that the English were marching on Adam's Rest. And, as unobtrusively as they had arrived there, they departed—

the bearded and shabby Boers, sitting slack in their saddles.

The next day a long stream of British soldiers in khaki entered Adam's Rest.

And now there was excitement. The Street was green-brown with uniforms. Every one seemed to be laughing and running about. The bars were a whirl of confused noise. The shops were full. Freddie Croft himself served two English lords with soap. All the people in The Street came out to see them. Never before had there been a lord in Adam's Rest. Probably never again would there be one. Every one stared at them. "Is that a lord?" the storekeeper's little daughter asked disappointedly.

Soon the soldiers were walking about Adam's Rest with girls. A girl and a man. Several girls and several men. One soldier with his arms round two girls. Two soldiers with one girl between them. . . . It was all very happy.

Into Mr. Lincoln's shop they crowded. They bought scent there. All the scent he had. One of the soldiers who came in was a C.I.V. corporal, about thirty years of age—a broad, dark fellow. He had eyes that were shaped for laughing, and a cleft in his chin. He left the shop carrying a box of Mr. Lincoln's best scent. As he went down the three steps to the verandah, he saw Janet coming from the house.

"Good-afternoon," he said politely.

"Good-afternoon," said Janet.

"Hot," he said.

"Yes," agreed Janet.

"My name's Webster," he said. "Martin Webster."

Janet remained silent.

"Pretty place, Adam's Rest," he asserted firmly. "With the river and all that. I hope you don't think we are making too much noise here."

There was a kind of eager modesty in his voice. Janet found herself approving him.

"I like the noise," she said suddenly. "It's always so quiet here."

"You haven't told me your name yet," he murmured.

She told him. He, in return, was communicative. She learnt that he was a clerk, that he lived with his people in a London suburb, that he had volunteered to come to South Africa because he was tired of office work, and that he wanted to settle in the country. When he felt he could no longer stay talking, he stood awkwardly silent for a moment. Then he said: "Perhaps I'll see you again?"

He looked up at her from the street.

"I *will* see you again," he said.

§ 2

He saw her the next day. He went into her father's shop and bought a tooth-brush. She had watched him through the window in their adjoining house. She was on the verandah as he left the shop.

Her brown hair waved over her ears, and was plaited and pinned low at the back of her head. She had on a deep-blue linen dress. It lent added colour to her blue eyes, a fresher tone to her clear skin. She wore short sleeves, and her arms were brown and shapely, as she extended them on each side of her to grasp the verandah rail she was leaning against.

They smiled at one another.

"I hoped you'd be here," he said.

"I'm always here," Janet answered. "There's nowhere else to be, and nothing else to do."

"Do you dance?" he asked.

"I love dancing."

"There's to be a dance at the schoolroom to-night. All the men are going. Will you be there?"

It was a false step. Janet retreated within herself. She wanted to explain to him that she was Joseph Lincoln's daughter, and that Joseph Lincoln was a gentleman, and her Aunt Laura was a lady, and she and Miriam had been at boarding-school in Cape Town. She would have liked him to know then and there that she could play the piano and had taken part in amateur theatricals, and that one of her best friends at boarding-school had been the daughter of a Cabinet Minister. She wanted him to understand that he was on no account to assume she was no better than any other person who lived in Adam's Rest; to realise, in short, that, even if she had spoken to him casually over the verandah rail, he was not to consider her in the same light as the girls who went up and down The Street, hanging on to soldiers' arms.

Instead she said shortly: "No, I'm not going."

He was a little obtuse. "Why? There'll be lots of fun."

For a moment she wished she were not Joseph Lincoln's daughter who had gone to boarding-school. Then she answered: "The crowd. I couldn't."

He understood now, realised a little of what she had not told him.

"I'm sorry I spoke about it," he said. "I didn't think. I was a fool."

His attitude was humble. It touched Janet.

"You're a lady. You couldn't dance with common Tommies. Drunk, too." He stopped. "I don't drink myself," he added after a moment.

It was then Miriam came out, her eyes light with angered excitement.

"This is Mr. Webster," said Janet.

Miriam looked at his stripes. "Do you know what your men have done?" she asked shortly. "They've taken the oars of my boat, and chopped them up for firewood. They had a moonlight picnic last night—Carrie and Susie were there, if it interests you to know, Janet—and they chopped the oars up to make a fire for tea. I can tell you, such a thing never happened when the Boers were here."

The man looked at her in uncomfortable silence.

"It's not Mr. Webster's fault," Janet defended him.

Miriam knew in her heart that she was being unjust, but could not restrain her desire to vent her anger on somebody.

"It's the fault of any one with authority. We've never had such drunkenness and such scenes in Adam's Rest before. There's no excuse for it at all. It isn't even as if you'd taken over an enemy town. It was the Boers did that. . . . I think you ought to be ashamed of yourselves."

Janet looked at Miriam with a red, furious face. "I apologise to you, Mr. Webster," she said, "for my sister's behaviour. I shall be very glad to come to the dance with you to-night." She had not known she was going to say that. But there it was. She had said it now.

"Janet," exclaimed Miriam, "you must be mad!"

But she realised, through her excitement, that the responsibility was on her.

Martin Webster interposed. "No. Don't go to the dance, Miss Lincoln."

"Don't you see that I *have* to go now?" Janet fumed. "If you won't take me, I'll go by myself."

Miriam had never seen Janet so agitated out of her habitual good-humour. Something new had arisen in her that Miriam could not define or trace. A force of Nature as old as life. Suddenly, and as unrestrainedly as was her habit, Janet had fallen in love. There was that in the young man before her that moved her strangely and agreeably. She found herself examining him, noticing things which she never noticed in other people. The shape of his fingers—the cigarette stains on them. The way his hair grew. The cleft in his chin. His eyebrows. His voice—a little husky, but pleasant. She had an impulse to touch his hand where it rested near hers—to touch it ever so lightly, just enough to know how it felt to do so. There was a faint smell of cigarette in his breath. She liked it. . . . She hoped he was appreciating the spirit of her defence of him and those with whom he had come there. She wanted him to know that she took a pride in maintaining his honour, that she was prepared to go to the length of a sacrifice on his behalf.

Miriam turned to Webster, a little frightened now, her anger gone. "I'm sorry I blamed you," she said. "Please persuade her not to go."

Webster looked helplessly from one sister to another.

"He can't persuade me," said Janet. "That dance is good enough for me."

§ 3

She knew it was not. Nevertheless, she went to it. They had all argued with her; her father and her aunt and her sister. Miriam had ranged from self-abasement through sarcasm to fury. Aunt Laura had pleaded and admonished. Mr. Lincoln had said, in his gentle, colourless voice: "Janet, I wish you not to go. But you are a grown-up woman. I can only advise you. I can't force you to obey me. You are responsible to yourself for your actions."

That had almost beaten her. And, by evening, the first exultation was past. Only obstinacy remained.

Webster had met her in The Street. He had walked with her in silence the hundred yards to the schoolhouse, where the dance was taking place.

There was a crowd of men in the hall—men in khaki, men in their best clothes. None of them wore evening dress. There were not more than half a dozen dress-suits in the whole of Adam's Rest.

The girls were mostly of the poor white or slightly coloured class. In South Africa the term "poor white" has a particular significance—a significance depending not entirely either on poverty or on whiteness, though it partakes of both. It has no connection with the working-class. A poor white belongs to a type characterised by dubious antecedents, dubious whiteness, dubious respectability, dubious earning capacity. It is a class living on the outskirts of civilisation. Its connection with humanity is that of the pariah dog to the domestic dog. The term "poor white" is, in South Africa, naturally a term of contempt.

Often the poor whites had a peculiar origin for which the old patriarchal traditions were largely to blame. A farmer would live on his farm with his whole family and all their connections. On his death the farm would be divided among his children. Each would go on working his portion in the old, comfortable, indolent way. The next generation would receive a still further subdivided share, would huddle helplessly together on a piece of land insufficient to meet even diminished needs and demands.

The children, as they grew up, would begin to straggle away; would crowd, with their backveld simplicity, their lack of training, into the towns and villages, and would become submerged in the already existing poor white class. Or they would settle in a corner of another man's ground, taking, in return for their work on his farm, the products of their own little section. These people were called "bijwoners." . . .

As they degenerated, they would sometimes associate with the coloured population, would live with them, marry them. At the location were little yellow children living with their Kaffir mothers, whose ancestors had once been large and powerful landowners.

Janet had hardly realised how different from the usual dances in the schoolroom this one was to be. Even if Freddie Croft did, now and then, edge himself in at such a dance, well, as the family never tired of repeating, he, at least, *kept* himself white. As a rule, pleasant enough people came there: A few young civil servants, farmers or shopkeepers; an occasional prosperous digger who had ridden twenty or thirty miles on horseback to get to Adam's Rest, and would ride twenty or thirty miles back the same night to be at work again at seven in the morning; occasionally a diamond-buyer or some other visitor from a neighbouring town or village. The girls and women would be of a better class, too. . . .

But to-night, by a tacit understanding, none of them had come. Janet found herself isolated, her heart hot and bitter. She blamed nobody except Miriam for her position. She stood next to Martin Webster, laughing, with a little sharp note in her voice. She had done it for him, but he would never respect her again as if she had not come there.

At the far end of the hall, she saw Carrie Lowe, and her sister Susie, already married to her Mr. Maxwell, a quiet man whom everybody forgot, and the mother of a daughter. They were happy and noisy, and laughing with their heads thrown back, very shrilly, each period of laughter finishing, characteristically of their type, on a high, long trailing note. They were very popular, greatly in demand.

The band, after preliminary gestures, broke into music. It consisted of a concertina, a guitar, and a fiddle, played by three coloured men. They rocked from side to side with the rhythm, tapped their feet on the floor to mark the time. " 'M, trum, trum; 'M, trum trum," went the guitar. The dance began.

It was decorous enough now. Every one danced sombrely, heavily, determinedly. The girls clung to their partners, coloured ribbons on their hair, and flying from their waists and necks; festive with beads and bangles and scent. Such men as were not in khaki wore a red handkerchief in their pockets or across their shirts. It was hot, and every one was perspiring freely.

Janet and Martin stood together watching the couples pass.

"Will you dance this with me?" he asked softly, tentatively.

She was torn between her weakness and her pride. She wanted to go away and cry; she wanted to show them all at home, and Martin, too, that if she had said she would dance—she would dance.

She nodded her head, and he put his arm round her waist for the waltz. She saw at once that he was a good dancer; felt, as if it ran in her own veins, the surge of his blood. The people circulating about her ceased to have any separate entity; they were a shifting, coloured blur. She was excited, happy.

The waltz stopped. Two soldiers approached, and, having been introduced to her by Martin, asked her for a dance. They were pleasant, clean boys. She looked at Martin. He nodded. She granted their request, danced with reckless enjoyment.

It was half-past ten. Some of the men were drunk already; a few women, too. The room was a great, confused noise.

Freddie Croft came up with bold suavity. He had a trim little black moustache; a big curl of black hair on his forehead; bold black eyes; a waist; very small feet.

"Can I have the pleasure?" he said with rigorous politeness.

Janet met Freddie's black eyes with her level blue ones, and turned to Martin Webster who was standing next to her. "I want to go home," she said, without looking again at Freddie.

§ 4

Outside her father's shop, Janet laid her head against the door, and suddenly began to cry—a storm of tears.

Martin put his hand on her shoulder. "Don't," he begged. "Oh, don't do that."

She shook her head.

"I can't stand it," he whispered.

"I should never have gone. I don't know what possessed me. Every one in Adam's Rest will be talking about it by to-morrow. They'll say I was dancing with a lot of poor whites and drunk soldiers; and they'll be delighted, because they think we're a stuck-up family. They'll remember it for years."

He remonstrated: "It was my fault. I spoke of it first. All the blame is mine. If you feel like this about it, I'll never be able to forgive myself."

His hand on her shoulder moved down to her hand and gripped it.

"I did it for you," she admitted recklessly. "Because Miriam——"

"I know," he said.

"But you'll never respect me again as if I hadn't done it."

"I love you for doing it. Don't you know I love you?"

She was in his arms. She never questioned or refused what Life offered. She took with both hands. Her tears were gone. A warmth was in her.

"I'm glad I went to the dance with you," she said.

CHAPTER VII

§ 1

But it was not as simple as all that. She slept late, and, when she awoke, her head was throbbing. She dressed herself slowly. How was she to meet her family? Exhilaration had gone from her. She felt tired.

None of them mentioned the dance to her; and that made it worse, as if it were an enormity better not discussed. During the day they addressed small commonplaces to her with grave politeness, thrust her outside their circle—into the pale—with the weapon of courtesy.

She found them all unbearable.

In the afternoon she went down to the river, where she had arranged to meet Martin.

"They don't take any notice of me," she told him.

"Won't they speak to you?"

"Yes, they speak," she said. "As if I were a stranger. They haven't asked me one question about the dance, or about you."

They sat down under a willow tree. Contact with him comforted her. "When will you marry me?" he said.

They arranged to marry at once. Practical considerations troubled them little. Fate had sent Janet a man as oblivious of consequences as she herself was.

He told her he was to stay on at Adam's Rest for some time. He had a little money saved up. On that

Janet could live, since living was cheap in Adam's Rest. Shortly the war would be over, and then he would settle in South Africa; he would earn her a comfortable living. He vowed she would never lack for anything. As he spoke, in his husky, pleasant voice, all difficulties faded magically away. They passed, the two of them, like spirits, through obstacles. "Why should we waste time?" he said, feeling, as she did, that, if he wanted a thing, it was not only his pleasure but his duty to have it. They were alike in many ways.

Janet went home happy, her face glowing. She wondered how she would tell them. At supper, that night, she sat silent, thinking that she must speak. She could not formulate her words, her heart began to beat thickly, there was a singing in her ears.

Then she heard herself saying in a loud, harsh, breathless voice,—

"I'm going to marry Martin Webster."

§ 2

Miriam looked at her sister dumbly. She was full of strange, inexplicable feelings. The chief of them was jealousy—jealousy of this vital thing that had happened to Janet. It seemed to her, as in her childhood, that Janet was outstripping her in swiftness of living; that her little sister had become a woman overnight, and had left her, Miriam, stranded alone on a little island in the sea of the past. She sat on her little island waiting for something to happen, for a ship to come along. And there she sat waiting.

Her imagination ran backward and forward, and

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brought pictures to her mind; Janet, in her blue dress, leaning over the verandah rail, and speaking to a man in khaki. She herself rushing on to the scene with a furious tirade. Janet, grown in a moment peculiarly important and dignified: "I apologise to you, Mr. Webster, for my sister's behaviour." Her sister's behaviour! As if she, Miriam, were a naughty child! She felt hot with anger.

In the evening Janet had asserted herself. "I told him I would go, and I'm going."

She had shut herself into her little bedroom, had come out an hour later, flushed, quite beautiful, her old home-made evening cloak on, and high-heeled black satin shoes. That was all they were able to see of her. She had turned her head slightly at the door. "Good-night," she had said shortly.

She had gone and danced among the dregs of Adam's Rest, among poor whites and drunken soldiers. Perhaps with them. For love of this man, this stranger—Martin she called him. They had spoken together of intimate things, there was passion between them. He had enveloped her in the cloak of his manhood and had housed her in the tent of his love, so that the old Janet was hidden from them.

Miriam looked at Janet as if, indeed, she no longer recognised her.

Her father was speaking,—

"Are you serious, Janet?"

"You know I'm serious."

"Where did you meet this man?"

"Here. Outside the shop. The day before yesterday."

Mr. Lincoln's face was grayer than ever. His lips, too, were gray. He lifted up his knife and fork with fingers that shook. "We'll talk later," he said.

They finished the meal in silence. Janet followed her father into the sitting-room. Her face was red and defiant.

Miriam and Aunt Laura sat under the lamp at the dining-table with their books. "It's no use talking to Janet," Miriam said after a few minutes, and her voice was hostile. "She has made up her mind to marry this man. You know Janet must always have what she wants."

Aunt Laura did not answer. She got up and walked about the room. She stopped near Miriam.

Then, "Why should she not have what she wants?" she said. "Why shouldn't she take? How does she know what is before her? Look at me. I was like Janet once. Is it better to be left with nothing?"

§ 3

Despite all his philosophy, Mr. Lincoln was agitated. The mere fact that his child was a woman choosing her own way in the world was disturbing. And then, although he was not much of a business man, he was not quite unpractical either. He asked Janet questions. Who was this man; what were his antecedents, his prospects? And since, while he remained a soldier, he was not free to live how he liked, what did they propose to do after the wedding?

Janet told him what she knew—lent weight to those savings of his that were to help them out until the war was over and he could begin to work and provide lavishly.

"In a few months everything will be all right," she said confidently. "It is only the difficulty of living apart those few months, and then there'll be no more trouble. So why should I not marry him, father, if I want to?"

"Because you hardly know him."

"But I do know him. I feel I do. If you mean I don't know much about his past life, that's true. But I mightn't know about that if I waited another twenty years. I don't want to, either. I trust him. I am sure everything is all right about him. And even if it wasn't, I wouldn't care."

Mr. Lincoln looked at her helplessly. Was this his daughter, this creature in glowing revolt? A little smile crept through his agitation and hovered about his grayish lips. He had a vision of himself as the stern parent. How well he knew in his heart that whatever he could do or say the thing was going to happen. It had been written when Janet was born that there would be a war, and a soldier would come to Adam's Rest and marry her. It had been written before Janet was born, when he married Janet's mother. Before that, when Janet's mother was born. Before that, when her mother was born. Before that, when—yes, it had been written at the commencement of all history. When the earth was a molten ball it had been determined that Janet should marry this man.

He had carried the logic of it to its uttermost absurd limits.

But say he opposed the affair. Would his opposition put an end to it? If his opposition could put an end to it, would it have achieved something desirable? Who was he to read into the years and say whether a thing done to-day would prove, twenty years hence, to have been a wise thing? What right had he to interpret wisdom at all? Thoughts came tapping at the door of Mr. Lincoln's mind. He sat there quietly looking at Janet. She saw nothing but the gray, impassive surface of his face.

She spoke again.

"It's my own risk. If I make a mistake, I won't blame anybody except myself."

Her words were running parallel with his reflections. She was right. It was her own risk. Her own soul, her own body, her own life. Each individual stood alone, alone against all the powers of the universe. Each individual battled solitarily, not, as one thought at first, with his soul against God and his body against man; but with his soul against man, and his body against God. Other individuals crossed his path—they came and went—all struggling in loneliness against God and man. They passed by like shadows, less stable than the bricks that housed him, than the chair that eased his body, than the books that comforted his mind.

He thought of himself. His father and mother, they had put him there. They had taught him, loved him, helped him; but they had never touched, never seen, the thing that was his very self. Now they were gone—shadows. He could hardly remember them, though he had loved them.

There were his brothers and sisters, there were the friends of his childhood. He had laughed with them and played with them. But his brothers and sisters he had not seen since he left England twenty-five years ago; now he hardly ever thought of them—only shadows. And his school-friends—he must have been intimate with them; yet he had forgotten their very names. They were less than shadows, they formed no shape even in his mind.

Then there was his wife—she had died nineteen years ago. How sweet their short married life had been! He had almost persuaded himself that here was something real. Yet her memory, too, was fading. Even she was nothing but a shadow.

And all the people around him—his own daughters—did he know them, did they know him? He was their father, he stood in relation to them. Did they realise him as Joseph Lincoln, a separate entity? Who knew of his thoughts and longings and fears, who saw in him that strange, peculiar little essential thing that made him different from all the world, and an individual in his own right?

"You wanted to say something to me," said Janet.

Mr. Lincoln answered slowly.

"I have nothing to say to you," he said. "You must make your own life as you think best. I can warn you to consider and be careful, but I cannot interfere. I hope you will do what is best for your own happiness."

His quiet voice frightened Janet. She had thought only of romance, but he was speaking of destiny. Her actions loomed up before her, suddenly portentous. Here was something of more consequence than going to the wrong kind of dance.

"You haven't seen Martin yet, father," she said almost timidly.

"Yes, bring him," he replied. . . .

And he thought "Another shadow!"

§ 4

Janet and Martin were married. The question of where Janet was to live afterwards had been settled, as they hoped and expected, by Janet's continuing to remain at her father's home. There had been a month's preparation, a fortnight's leave to an adjacent town, where the marriage and honeymoon had taken place, the return. . . .

As their preliminary month ran out, Miriam had found her emotions swaying sharply backwards and forwards. Although she did not know it, she had something of her father's habit of thought. Her first jealousy had passed. Now, when she considered the affair, she felt eagerly sometimes that this she saw was romance; but, sometimes, again, that it was all a little pitiful, a little silly. They believed themselves so important, the two poor young things, pushed and harried by Nature till they hardly knew what they were doing. They thought one another so exceptional, so wonderful, so godlike. This little sister of hers, not long ago a greedy and naughty child—a man had come from another continent, over thousands of miles of water, to her; and there he sat, gazing at her, spellbound, as if she were Circe. This man—at thirty a clerk at two pounds a week—he was Ulysses of a thousand adventures. They touched one another and quivered, they looked at one another and blushed. It was ridiculous. Yes. But was it not a little enviable, too? What, after all, was there wrong in its being natural?

Mr. Lincoln had been, as was his habit, mildly and unobtrusively acquiescent in all their arrangements. He knew Janet too well, saw too clearly the effect opposition might have.

The day before the wedding he had called Janet into the little office behind his shop. Its walls were lined with shelves of empty bottles, and, on the top shelf, lay a litter of dusty books and untidy papers—the accumulations of years. Mr. Lincoln had postponed the task of going through them for nearly two decades, and chaos had been added to chaos. In a corner stood a bucket of water. Some files of receipts hung on nails near the desk. On the desk itself lay a translation of Mommsen's *History of Rome*. Over all was the smell of chemicals and drugs.

"Well, Janet?" he said.

"You wanted me, father." They smiled at one another tremulously. There were so many things to be said that they could not say. He pulled out his top right-hand drawer, and fumbled about. "This must be tidied up," he muttered. "Impossible to find anything here."

Presently a cheque-book emerged from the muddle. He flattened it out on his desk and wrote slowly.

"I wish I could give you more, Janet," he said.

It was a cheque for a hundred pounds. She thanked him shyly; gave him a quick, soft, fluttering kiss on his forehead, as if her lips were feathers, as if she were a baby who did not know how to kiss. Yet she knew.

CHAPTER VIII

§ 1

After their fortnight they came back, the young couple, to Adam's Rest. They were very happy, they looked very handsome—he in his khaki, not too tall, but well-built and broad, bursting with health, his eyes shaped for laughing, his dented chin; and she in her new winter coat and skirt (it was getting on for May in nineteen hundred), ruddily brown, a Juno of a woman, all physical vitality. Since ever she had notified the world of her achieved womanhood by pinning up her long, thick, brown hair, Janet had looked older than Miriam, who was fairer, slighter, more wistful. For all Miriam's quick brain, her spiritual complication of romanticism and asceticism was written on her face for those who could see. There was eagerness in her eyes, repression in her lips. She presented an effect of a rapidly moving thing forcibly held back.

Her childhood's habit of not yielding to a delight had persisted in her. She could not take readily or enjoy generously. She still inflicted on herself unnecessary deprivations—never hastened to relieve a pain, never ate quite as much as she wanted to, nor dressed quite as well as she could afford. She had the, to Janet, ridiculous and senseless habit of hanging her best clothes in a wardrobe when she might be using them. In the end, it happened frequently enough that Janet, her own good clothes worn out, would borrow something belonging to Miriam and would wear it until it became, first in effect, then in reality, her own. That, apparently, Miriam did not mind. She stinted no one except herself. . . .

One of the pictures that remained permanently in Miriam's mind was this one of the return to Adam's Rest of Martin and Janet. They were so full of bliss. Their eyes grew moist when they looked at one another, they drew together as if magnetised. He kissed Miriam, called Mr. Lincoln Father, and Aunt Laura Auntie. Whenever he was free he was there, of course, quite the son of the house.

Janet and he—they were always gay and smiling and laughing.

§ 2

But not for long. The country was peaceful around Adam's Rest, and nearly all the troops who had settled down so agreeably in their tents on the river bank had received orders to leave. Among them was Martin. He comforted Janet with his promise that the war would soon be over, and then he would come back for her, and would begin to make that fortune which South Africa offered to every immigrant; he would work his fingers to the bone for her (he used exactly those words); only she must think of him and love him while he was away.

And so the soldiers left Adam's Rest. One regiment was sent away to a village on the Free State border. And in this regiment was a man who became suddenly very important in the eyes of all the people in Adam's

Rest. He was a tall Goth of a man, with bloodshot, bright-blue eyes; a red moustache; big protruding teeth, set far apart; and a great laugh like the braying of a donkey. He was not, in himself, a distinguished character. But he became important because, when he departed from Adam's Rest, Carrie Lowe departed too; and because the place which was his destination was also her destination.

Her three children remained with her mother.

§ 3

It was those pale eyes of Carrie's, those yellowish-green eyes she had, and her freckles, so distinctive in a half-caste, that were her undoing. Long ago, while her father was still there—no one knew now where Mr. Croft was—she had been his favourite child, and he had spoilt her. That is, she had been his favourite child and he had spoilt her as far as he recognised the existence of his children at all.

Mr. Croft was not a man of profound emotions or an exalted philosophy. He was a blond, stout Yorkshireman without any inherited prejudices against colour, and he had married his half-caste woman without love and also without any soul-searchings on questions of miscegenation. His ancestors troubled him little and his descendants less. He never saw himself as the progenitor of a long line of beings inferior from the standpoint of civilisation. He wanted some one to make his bed and mend his clothes and prepare his food. He never read and he seldom thought. He was honest in a lethargic kind of way, drank too much sometimes, but never ill-treated anybody. He was, from his wife's point of view, an admirable husband. But (even she little knew it) there was in her small brown body a vital force which rendered her his superior. Although he had one day left her without explanation or warning, she had never spoken an evil word against him; and, if he chose to return to her, she would receive him back thankfully and unquestioningly.

He had, however, had a kind of partiality for Carrie, brought her sweets, took her on his knee sometimes. As the whitest one of the family, and as her father's pet, she occupied a unique position in the household, and made demands for its practical recognition. Everything that was best went to her; and she had had, from the age of twelve, admirers. Some of her admirers were boys, and some were men, but they were all white.

She had married, at the age of eighteen, and in the full bloom of her maturity, a young policeman. His small pay was adequate to the needs of Adam's Rest. They had built themselves a corrugated iron house, which was just as clean; just as crowded with small things—ornaments, laces, shelves, scraps of furniture; just as uncomfortable and stuffy as her mother's. But where Mrs. Croft made her own bread and preserves, Carrie bought hers; and where Mrs. Croft had never needed, in her household, more than the occasional assistance of a little Kaffir girl, bewildered by the luxuries and civilisations of the Croft home, Carrie kept permanently a grown-up Kaffir woman, and grumbled at "these Kaffirs." It was true wages were low enough. Carrie paid her servant fifteen shillings a month. Still, keeping her at all implied, not only freedom from work, but a rising in status—an insistence that she was as white as anybody.

Carrie had been happy with her policeman. But then he had gone to fight, and she and her three children had been compelled, by financial necessity, to take refuge with her mother. And, at her mother's house, things were irksome. She did not feel as comfortable there as in her own house; she had not the attendance she was accustomed to; the children seemed to be for ever sick or dirty or crying, for ever making demands on her care.

Worse than anything was the fact that for Carrie to live with her mother was a social backsliding. Heaven knows how she had laboured to get together her white connection of friends, how careful she had been that none of her relations (except perhaps Susie, and, very occasionally, Freddie) should mar the whiteness of any little gatherings that took place at her home. Certainly every one knew that her mother was old, coloured Mrs. Croft, but one might choose to forget it when she was not present. Now Carrie was forced to live with her, and she was always and inevitably present. Nearly all her white friends dropped Carrie. She was beginning to feel very lonely.

An aggravating circumstance was that lately Mrs. Croft had fallen into a kind of association with Henry again. Not Henry's native wife, of course, but Henry himself; and, sometimes, his little, dark, specially cleaned-up children. They used to come and sit in Mrs. Croft's sitting-room, four of them (Henry's family was steadily mounting), tight against one another in a row on the sofa under the window. The lace curtains of the window would make a background for their little woolly heads. Their black eyes would rove wonderingly round the decorated room, would fasten themselves lovingly on the beautiful, big pink flowers on the satiny pale-blue wall-paper. Their plump calves would bulge above their tightly-laced little black boots. The two little girls' dresses would spread, stiffly starched, over the little boys' knees. They exuded an air of modest prosperity.

For Henry, with his savings, was buying sheep and cattle from the Kaffirs, and selling them, at those exorbitant prices they liked to pay, to the military. Henry was making money. He was not at the hotel any more. His family by no means lived like the Kaffirs in the neighbourhood of Henry's house. His success was, he felt, the reward of a lifetime's thrift. It compensated him for the isolation in which he stood between black and white.

But with his mother things had not been going well lately. Not enough babies were being born in Adam's Rest; her tenant in the next-door house, which Mr. Croft had left her as a solatium for his desertion, had not been paying his rent regularly. Carrie and her three children were living with her, scantily assisted by casual remittances from Mr. Lowe. . . . For the last six months Henry had been helping his mother with money. . . .

And so they sat there, Henry's small children, grave and decorous, eating Mrs. Croft's heavy cake, saying to Mrs. Croft in the Dutch Taal which was their idiom, "Yes, Gra'ma. No, Gra'ma. Please, Gra'ma." They seldom opened their mouths in more extended conversation.

Now, Carrie was there, too, and to her they said, "Yes, auntie. No, auntie. Please, auntie." Those little blacks called her, the wife of a white policeman, the mother of white children, they called her auntie!

§ 4

Then the soldiers had ridden into Adam's Rest. And life had become suddenly a bright, whirling thing. Carrie went to picnics with them, and danced with them, and laughed with them. They did not mind—not they! —the dark skin of her mother. They crowded into Mrs. Croft's sitting-room, and jovially ate her cake and drank her tea that tasted like medicine. There was that huge fellow with the red moustache and the protruding, far-apart teeth, whose bulky limbs spread themselves out on Mrs. Croft's spindly chairs. How he laughed until it would seem that the sound of his voice would burst the little room apart! How jolly and amusing he was! How big and strong and manly and blond! Carrie's heart went out towards blond men.

She loved him. And when he left Adam's Rest she followed him.

CHAPTER IX

§ 1

During this first year of the new century, Miriam had two preoccupations. They were both concerned with vital statistics. With birth and with death.

This was the first: A new generation was knocking at the gate of Life. Janet was going to have a child. It was not, to any of them, an unexpected contingency, but it moved them in strange and different ways.

Of the four, Janet accepted the fact with the most complacency. Problems of the future never troubled her. That there might be practical difficulties ahead she admitted, but she trusted that, when the time came, they would right themselves. She had no romance in her, even although she had married impulsively, and she did not think of children as holy gifts from Heaven. On the contrary, she felt, without exactly defining her state of mind to herself, that, without any divine agency, she was the author of a unique and notable achievement. She was in superb health, and did not tremble before the classic pangs of childbirth.

To Miriam Janet had become suddenly something, not exactly strange, but certainly something very distant. She was not, would never be, the old Janet any more. Even Mr. Lincoln found himself a little pleased, a little sad, a little shocked, and a little shy.

But more strongly than any of them the thought of Janet's coming child affected Aunt Laura. It appalled her. She loved children, but the facts of their getting and bearing were to her not only mysterious and repugnant—she could not even look upon them as being natural. She realised herself that her attitude was a perversion of instinct, and strove by added kindnesses to Janet to conquer her feelings.

Janet saw nothing of the struggle, and accepted the kindnesses as, under the circumstances, her due.

§ 2

Miriam's second preoccupation with vital statistics lay outside her home.

In Adam's Rest location, as the war continued, the Kaffirs suffered. Many of them worked on neighbouring diggings or on farms, but diamonds were slumping, cattle were dying of Rinderpest, and the Kaffirs' wages had been reduced, their services often dispensed with. Concurrently the prices of all commodities had risen. They did not make great demands. Some mealie-meal they wanted regularly, a little meat occasionally, a blanket when it was very cold, or some rag of a garment. In good times they drank tea and coffee. But they admitted that these were not good times, and were willing to give up luxuries. They could not, however, live entirely without food; and, since food was not to be had, they, without any unnecessary fuss, adopted the only alternative. They died.

Riding across the veld one afternoon towards sunset, Miriam came upon an old Kaffir herd, driving his sheep home across the yellow winter stubble. He was small and wizened, his eyes buried in wrinkles. As he walked along, he picked up sticks from the ground. He was cold, and he blew the warmth of his breath on his stiff, whitish hands. There was a kind of frosted glaze on them. He was barefoot, too, and so ragged that his remnants of garments seemed to be falling from him. He wore, as protection against the weather, a grain-sack, opened out, with a slit for the head.

Simply to say something, Miriam asked him if the sticks were to make a fire for his supper.

"Yes," he said, answering her in the Colonial medium of the Taal.

"And what are you going to cook?"

He looked at her with a flicker of surprise that died back into numbed indifference. A strange question. What should he cook?

"Mealie-meal," he said.

"Only mealie-meal?" exclaimed Miriam.

He regarded her patiently.

"And what," she continued, "did you have in the middle of the day?"

"I do not eat in the middle of the day."

"And in the morning?"

"I do not eat in the morning."

"What time do you get up?" she asked.

"I get up when the sun gets up."

"And don't you have anything then—not coffee?"

He shook his head. "No. I do not have coffee."

He stooped to pick up a stick, and began to walk off. "Good-night, little missis," he said.

"Wait," cried Miriam. "Tell me. When did you have meat last?"

The herd thought. "I don't remember the day," he said. "But it was on that day last week when my master killed a sheep. I got the pluck then." His face lit up at a recollection. "Once," he said, "I found a dead trek-ox in the veld. It was long dead, and the white people did not want it. That was a good time for us."

The sheep wandered on, and their shepherd followed them. The land was dry, and they too were thin. And it suddenly seemed to Miriam that only physical sorrow was real sorrow—bodily deprivation and bodily pain. It was an impertinence to be healthy and warm and well-fed, and to make demands. She herself had had spiritual yearnings—she despised them. What were her vague dissatisfactions compared with this crude problem of an empty stomach?

She rode after the herd.

"To-morrow," she said, "you must come to my house. I will see what can be done. My heart is sore that the people suffer hunger."

She turned her horse for home, a tumult of pity in her. It was as if she had seen a vision. She could hardly wait for the coming of the morrow that she might begin her work.

All her life that picture of the old Kaffir herd against the winter sunset remained with Miriam, as saints treasure the memory of a revelation. For the first time, she clearly realised human suffering.

§ 3

She launched herself eagerly on her campaign. She walked from house to house in Adam's Rest begging for contributions. She rode out to the farmers, and asked them for a little daily sour milk and buttermilk. They had nearly all had losses from the Rinderpest, and some of them were frankly indifferent to whether there were a few more or less hungry Kaffirs in the world—a Kaffir, to them, was not really exactly a human being—but they yielded good-humouredly to Miriam's pleading, promised to give what they could.

It became, in a way, the fashionable thing to take an interest in the Adam's Rest natives. Every one assisted, from the magistrate's wife to Susie Maxwell. A kind of depôt—a disused store-room—was established for the distribution of bread and soup and sour milk. The Kaffir children came down from the locations for their portions. They sat, with their tins, in the winter sun, outside the store-room, and warmed their half-clad bodies while they waited their turns. Occasionally they were quite naked, except for a string round the waist from which hung, in front, a rag or some beads as a tribute to society. The brown skin of their bodies had a whitish glaze of frost and dirt. Their bellies were round and swollen—even their navels protruded like knobs. But their arms and legs were fleshless. As often as not their heads with the little black peppercorns were white with scurf, and they ran at eyes and nose. Most of them had the large, overhanging, round foreheads and the sunken-in faces of degeneracy. Strange foods held their souls in their bodies—roasted locusts, coffee made of wild berries, roots like turnips, with mealie-meal as the solid ballast. They died as soon as they got ill; and they got ill readily. They seldom cried and never complained. They sat like small, grave Buddhas.

They seemed, indeed, as some of the farmers said, hardly human beings.

Sometimes Miriam took it on herself to visit the location. It lay, like an eruption, on the face of the hill. Not anywhere near the location was there a tree or any green thing planted by a living agency. Hive-shaped huts, constructed of mud and reeds and rags and tins, clung together in groups. Each hut, windowless, doorless, airless, sheltered, in its single compartment, a family. Often, even, the derelicts of another family as well. In the daytime, when the sun shone, they lived outside. But on winter nights they crawled through an opening in their huts, half the height of a man; and made, in a tin, a fire of dried cow-dung and sticks, which smoked horribly; and let down the flap of sacking that covered the entrance, fastening it tight with a stone; and huddled together promiscuously, and slept on the dung-smeared ground, wearing the clothes which they never took off till they fell off, and covering themselves with goatskins and evil-smelling, old, shoddy blankets. . . . They shared with one another their food, their shelter, and their diseases.

When Miriam asked them how they were getting on, they said politely: "It goes well still. Only," they sometimes added, "we suffer hunger. There is also much sickness."

It happened quite frequently that Miriam might see some Kaffir, speak to him, under apparently normal circumstances, and hear casually a week later that he was dead. He might possibly have said, when she asked him how he was, that he did not feel quite right in the stomach or chest, but he would certainly not have conveyed an impression of vital stress.

They lay down to die, the Kaffirs, like cattle in the field. Their time had come. What was life that one should cling to it?

Very occasionally Miriam caught a glimpse of a thought beyond. There was a farm labourer who had hurt himself in the course of his work. He had been exceptional in that degenerate community—a great, powerful native of Zulu origin. He had felt the might of Samson in him, had exulted in the thought that many lived by his efforts. He had a large family, and had inherited also the family of his dead brother. He worked for them all. And now this thing had happened to him, and he knew that he was dying. From his lips, for almost the only time in her experience, did Miriam, on inquiry, get the answer: "It goes badly."

He sat huddled together outside the hut, his face drawn and gray through its blackness. It was often difficult for the casual observer to detect ill-health behind the dark skin of a native, but here it lay brazenly on the surface.

He shook his head. "No, little missis, it goes badly with me. I am done." He touched his stomach with a comprehensive gesture. "There lies the thing," he said.

He shook his head again.

"And now . . . the old woman, and the children, and the children of my brother . . . I worked for them. I gave them bread. They lived through me. . . ."

He spread out his hands.

"I don't know," he said, "what will become of the world when I am gone."

§ 4

There was a district surgeon in Adam's Rest, but he was old and lazy and generally a little drunk. In any case, the needs of the location were beyond his range and powers. And it was customary for natives to come to Mr. Lincoln, whom they regarded as a medical authority, and give him vague details of diseases. "I cough" they would say. Or "My stomach it draws." . . . "I have a pain in my head." . . . "The trouble is with my chest." . . . But generally it was comprehensively a complaint about their stomachs. They had a great faith in medicines—particularly in Dutch-labelled patent medicines—chest-drops, stomach-drops, strengthening-drops—and an invincible belief in aperients—of which they took unlimited quantities.

They spoke with simple frankness about themselves, and as readily with Miriam, whom they considered a useful substitute, as with her father.

If, on the other hand, the medicines did not help, they admitted fatalistically that their time had come, and turned their faces away from the world.

Heaven knows whether they saw another world!

At last Miriam was realising her childhood's ambition of service. Realising it a little romantically, yet honestly and with self-abnegation.

She was sometimes shocked to find that she was happy.

CHAPTER X

§ 1

Early in 1901 Janet's child was born—a big healthy boy, who at once took kindly to the world he was destined to live in.

A few months before there had been a kind of crisis in the home. It had come into Aunt Laura's mind that, under the strange new circumstances, she was no longer entitled to remain in the house of her brother.

"I was glad to be with you," she told him, "while I felt I was of some use. But the girls are women now. They are both at home. And I feel there are too many of us."

"Do you get in one another's way?" asked Mr. Lincoln.

"I don't want to put it like that. Only they have as much right to be in charge as I have, and we can't all be in charge in one small house. Besides, you don't need me here, and why should I be an unnecessary expense?"

She had lived for twenty years in the little house next to the chemist shop. It had not, perhaps, been an actively happy existence, but, if one refrained from morbid thoughts, it had been, at least, peaceful and sheltered. She had come to Adam's Rest at the age of twenty-three, bitter at the wantonness of Fate, to care for her dead sister's children, and to hide herself from the world. Her mirror told her that romance was past for her; yet she felt herself to be so much the same Laura Hemming she had always been that it was difficult at first to realise that to strangers she was nothing but the shell of a woman—a woman with a too-round left eye, a red and displaced eyelid, and a scarred and sagging cheek.

But the years had passed slowly, and she had come to know that ruined face for hers. It had imprinted itself on her spirit and chastened it. It had embedded itself in her heart and smothered its yearnings.

She had trained herself to a philosophy of denial. Those things she could not have—they were not desirable. This romance people spoke of—a dream. Marriage—one had but to consider the divorces. Children—little sorrows when they were little, big sorrows when they were big. The gaiety of cities—a weariness. Had it not been said that life would be tolerable if it were not for its pleasures? . . .

She hugged such thoughts to herself; and yet felt them to be a delusion. She told herself it was better to live peacefully at Adam's Rest, and wait for spring to grow into summer, and for autumn to dwindle into winter; to pass there quietly from youth to age and from life to death; and yet knew, at the same time, that peacefulness was not enough.

For sometimes madness overtook one. And then one stood on the path of Hope, and looked wildly up and down, and clutched at the skirts of passing Fate, and prayed and demanded—asking for something, a little, only a little. And Fate flung one aside and tore itself away, and raced on laughing. And there one lay, spurned and fooled. . . .

Mr. Lincoln was speaking.

"Janet will not be here permanently," he said.

She answered him in a hushed voice.

"That is what I felt when the girls came home from school. I told myself that it was only a matter of a year or two, and then they would get married, and you would need me as before to keep house for you."

"That is still the position," said Mr. Lincoln.

Aunt Laura shook her head.

"I don't see it. There is Janet, and soon there will be——" her cheeks flushed; there were certain things Aunt Laura could not speak about easily—"there will be the little one."

"Still, the war can't last for ever. Martin must make a home for his family."

"So Janet and he said eight months ago. But the war is still going on, and it shows no signs of ending. And then, even if the war does finish soon, it will take them some time to get settled. For all we know, Martin may have to come to us for a while himself. I have thought it all out very carefully, Joseph."

"So it seems," said Mr. Lincoln with his quiet smile.

"And, in any case, there is Miriam. Miriam is twenty-four, and I see no man in Adam's Rest suitable for her to marry."

"Altogether," said Mr. Lincoln, "you are feeling in a thoroughly optimistic state of mind. . . . Now, my dear girl, I assure you, the war will finish one day. And Martin will take Janet to a home of their own. And Miriam will marry." He put his hand on her shoulder. "And then I shall be left all alone, as you originally foresaw. Conditions have not really changed. You mustn't desert me, Laura."

Aunt Laura put her head down on her arms, and hid her face. "I was so frightened," she said in a voice muffled with tears, "I was so frightened that I would have to leave. I didn't know where I could go to, or what I should do. But I didn't want to be in the way."

Mr. Lincoln patted her shoulder in silence.

§ 2

They called the baby Felix, and when he was a month old, Martin came to Adam's Rest on a sudden leave. He looked browner and healthier than ever, and was even putting on weight. His laughing eyes were bright and cheerful.

He brought a vividness into the home that it had distinctly lacked. Every one seemed to be always laughing with him. He teased Aunt Laura, helped Miriam to distribute sour milk among her Kaffirs, sat on the counter in Mr. Lincoln's shop and told him stories of the campaign. War, to Martin, was a tale not of death but of life.

But most of the day he spent with Janet, hanging over the baby. He put his great brown finger on the small chin, and made strange noises. He lifted him from his cot, and shook up his newly-imbibed milk. He pointed out extraordinary resemblances.

"How one bit of face can look like so many things, I don't know," laughed Janet, exultant, but maintaining her sanity.

Martin felt as proud and important as if the child were the completed result of a life-time's conscious effort.

He prophesied tremendous things for him. "We'll make this of him and that of him. . . . He's going to be a great man—our Felix—you mark my words. . . . Well, the next best thing to being a great man oneself is to be the father of a great man, isn't it?"

He was so complacent that he annoyed Miriam.

"And, besides, it's certainly easier," she said.

Martin looked at her suspiciously.

"What do you mean?"

"I mean it's so much less trouble. All you've got to do is to leave him to make the effort, and you simply take your share of the result without having any bother yourself. Lots of people get distinction that way."

He sprang up and shook her amiably. Martin was not thin-skinned.

"You're too clever for me, Miriam. But if poor Felix grows up with a sharp tongue, I'll know where he got it from, and I'll tell him about the very first time I met his dear Aunt Miriam, and about how she scolded me because some other people chopped up her oars for firewood."

His bright eyes twinkled at Miriam, and she felt herself liking this jolly brother-in-law of hers.

Indeed, they all liked him. And, as Aunt Laura said to Mr. Lincoln after Martin left Adam's Rest to return to his regiment, and the house seemed so quiet again,—

"Under the circumstances, Janet could certainly have done worse for herself."

§ 3

A very small girl was amusing herself by helping the Kaffir nursemaid to wheel Felix's perambulator. It was a child Miriam knew well, and yet she felt as if she had not really seen her before to-day. To-day the picture she made on Miriam's consciousness was so sharp, that, whenever in after life Miriam thought of The Street, she saw also one aspect of it as a setting for Susie Maxwell's little daughter, Frances.

Frances must have been at this time six years old, but it was already possible to see the kind of woman she was likely to become. She was dark—obviously too dark for pure-blooded whiteness—but her skin was delicately clear and pale. Her lips were a deeper red, too, than the lips of a white child would have been, and heavily moulded. She had a little firm, high-bridged nose, and a chin full and round. Her eyes, under brows quite level, were a soft velvety-black, and black-lashed. Her long, straight, coarse, black hair marked her African descent. She wore a dress and sun-bonnet of bright pink gingham, her sturdy brown legs were bare, and her feet sandalled.

It was an early afternoon at the end of summer, and the roofs of corrugated iron glistened on both sides of The Street; the trees threw barely a shadow; and, descending from the sky, and, ascending from the earth, the passionate glare and the quivering heat met and embraced.

Under the dark-green hood of his perambulator Felix slept. His nursemaid walked beside him, a dark red cashmere cloth swathed round her head, her face open to the sun, her feet bare to the earth, wearing a white apron as mark of her service in the cause of Felix.

Pushing the perambulator slowly, the centre of the picture, walked this little bright pink splash on the landscape: Frances, the daughter of Susie Maxwell.

She stopped as Miriam approached, and smiled shyly. "Good-afternoon, Miss Lincoln." She spoke in the drawling sing-song which was her heritage. She had a voice very deep for a child of her years.

Miriam returned the smile. "Do you like wheeling the baby?"

Frances nodded emphatically, the shy smile broadening.

The conversation halted.

"And how is your mother?" inquired Miriam.

"Quite well, thank you," came the polite formula in return.

"And your granny?"

"My granny is all right, too. Only she's got rheumatics." She drew a long breath, then volunteered proudly: "My Uncle Freddie, he's engaged to get married with Miss du Toit."

Here was news for Adam's Rest. Freddie Croft and Miss du Toit! A social bound for the Crofts almost equal to Carrie's achievement of the white policeman. Even Frances recognised the importance of it. For Miss du Toit was the indisputably white daughter of the bijwoner on Conrad Hugo's farm. Miriam knew her well. She had been a child with the beauty of a Teuton Goddess, blond, with features as regular as if they had been chiselled from a rock. She had been mature at fifteen. To-day she was nineteen, and already running to seed. She had coarsened so that even her perfect nose was thick now, and all her slim grace was lost in an excess of flesh. She had always been dull, and now Time had kneaded her stupidity into her great placid face for all to see, and her laugh was a wide open-mouthed thing that never reached her big, vacant eyes.

But it was her blondness, her blue eyes and pink cheeks, and yellow hair, that made his mating with Magdalena du Toit a triumph for Freddie Croft. Not as often as a white man married a brown woman, did a white woman marry a brown man. . . .

Of all the Crofts Miriam disliked Freddie most: his eager, obtrusive greeting of her, a greeting she could not ignore since for years they had gone to school together; his alert, ingratiating attendance when she was compelled to visit the shop at which he was still working; his suave, intimate laugh; his hair, moustache, and eyes, all oily. . . . After all these years that attempt of his to kiss her at school still nauseated her.

And yet, good had come of that attempt. To it was directly due the better education she had received, and all the difference it had made to her life.

Strange, she mused, as Frances laboured on with the perambulator, that Freddie Croft should have been one of the instruments chosen by Fate to mould her destiny.

CHAPTER XI

§ 1

THE war was over, and Martin Webster was back with his wife and child. He bought himself a gray flannel suit in one of the shops in Adam's Rest, and, for the first time, they saw him otherwise than in uniform. Even Janet had to admit that his appearance suffered by the change into mufti. He looked a little coarser, a little stouter, not as straight and firm and strong.

He fitted himself—one might almost say he wedged himself—amiably into the household. "One month's holiday," he said, "and then to work."

His presence seemed to fill the little house to overflowing. In summer, when they lived outside, and bathed in the river, the advent of a visitor meant little more than another bed under a tree or vine. But in winter all the ordinary difficulties arose—where and how he should sleep, what he should do with his belongings, who should have the bathroom first, what he would like for breakfast. This breakfast business was one of the chief worries. In common with many South Africans, the Lincolns did not regard breakfast as a regular meal. There was porridge made as a rule. One ate an egg if one wanted it. Butter and jam or honey stood on the table. On rare occasions a grill found itself there.

Mr. Lincoln made his breakfast invariably on a plate of porridge, or, alternatively, an egg. Neither Aunt Laura nor Miriam ever had anything except tea and a slice of buttered toast or bread and honey. If meat or fish was provided, it was generally for Janet.

Now here was Martin, and he made no secret of the fact that he regarded breakfast as the best meal of the day. "That's the way we live in England," he told them. . . . Except that he had porridge instead of soup, he expected, as Aunt Laura confided to Miriam, to get a dinner served up at breakfast time. And this meant that, instead of leaving breakfast to the casual ministrations of the Kaffir girl, Aunt Laura, who still ran the house, had to make an early pilgrimage to the kitchen and perform what was, to Martin, the sacred rite of preparing his breakfast. Now and then he would protest mildly: "It's too bad of me to give you all this trouble, auntie." However, he would continue: "But, by Jove, this is nice. Especially after the food in camp, too. Wouldn't some of the chaps envy me if they could see me!"

He would look at Aunt Laura with his good-humoured eyes and cheerful smile, and she would feel that, really, it was worth while troubling to get that warm approval.

After breakfast Martin used to go into the chemist-shop and talk to his father-in-law about his prospects. Mr. Lincoln would put his hand on his book, and consider the matter.

"I won't do the kind of work I ran away from in England," said Martin with determination. "I don't want to see a high stool again."

"What then?"

"Well, commerce is the thing for a new country, of course."

"No doubt. But what about capital?"

Capital was certainly, as they all knew by this time, rather a difficulty with Martin. Those savings of his on which Janet was going to live until the war ended, had long ago exhausted themselves. As a matter of fact, although Martin had been justifiably proud at having saved at all out of his two pounds a week in England, fifty pounds, even in those days, did not go far in South Africa. The hundred pounds her father had given Janet for a wedding present was also finished. And, lately, Janet's pocket-money had been supplied to her by the family in the shape of Christmas and birthday presents to herself and Felix.

But now the question of money was a little more obtrusive.

"Well," said Martin, "there must be people knocking around who have capital, and are wanting a wide-awake and trustworthy man to go in with."

Mr. Lincoln removed his hand from his book, closed the book and put it down on the counter. He looked at his son-in-law. Here was an optimist.

Martin returned his father-in-law's regard complacently.

"And do what?" said Mr. Lincoln mildly.

"Oh, one thing or another. I haven't thought the matter out very clearly yet. But once my month is up——"

He hung on to that month of his with the firm grip of a schoolboy taking a holiday. "Well," he sighed, as the days ran along, "my month will soon be over now."

Towards the end of the month, he put an advertisement in various papers in Cape Town, Johannesburg, Bloemfontein, Kimberley: "Young Englishman, full-time war service, requires partnership in commercial undertaking."

He received a large number of answers from people who had everything except cash. They wanted to open a factory, or dredge for diamonds, or buy a bar, or extend a business. They wanted to sell promising shares or a thriving concern. They wanted to borrow on unimpeachable security. They wanted to share a valuable idea with an ex-service man—no one but an ex-service man.

However they varied in other particulars, they had one characteristic in common—they all needed money.

Janet leaned over his shoulder as he read the answers.

"Those don't seem to be much use," she said.

"Give me time," he expostulated. "My month isn't finished yet."

§ 2

But the month passed, and another month passed, and Martin Webster was still living with the Lincolns at Adam's Rest.

Now he was beginning to narrow down his demands. "Young Englishman," he advertised, "full-time war service, capable and energetic, requires position."

To this advertisement he received no answer at all. As Mr. Lincoln pointed out when he showed it to him in the papers: "It's vague, you see, Martin. It doesn't mean anything. If I had any jobs to give away myself, I wouldn't answer an advertisement like that."

"Then what am I to say?"

"Well, generally one specifies a particular kind of position. But you don't seem to know what you want."

"How can I know what I want when I don't know what's going?" asked Martin with an air denoting a very logical attitude. "I've replied to a few advertisements, but they haven't been any use either. The thing to do, it seems to me, is to get agencies or something like that, or find a man who has agencies and go in with him—work the country, you know—on commission."

Martin was rather proud of that term "work the country." It showed an intimacy with commercial life.

"I don't understand that sort of thing myself," confessed Mr. Lincoln, "but I seem to fancy one would need business experience for that. Your acquaintance with a certain kind of ledger work wouldn't help you there."

"Then what do you advise?" asked Martin. "Farming?"

Mr. Lincoln shook his head. The man talked like a schoolboy. He appeared to think that the mere fact of his being an Englishman in South Africa fitted him for any avocation he chose to name.

"My dear Martin," he said patiently, speaking to him as if, indeed, he were a child, "you can't be a farmer because you have no land and no stock and no capital. You can't be a bijwoner even, because you have no experience. I don't want to urge you to do something you don't care for, but if I were you, I should try to get work I can do—a clerical job, I mean—and wait till things are a bit more settled in the country. In the meantime, you could feel your way about."

"That I won't consider," said Martin firmly. "I swore I would never go back to an office, and I swear I never will."

As time went on, Martin accustomed himself to his position. He had done his best to get work. No man could do more. They all knew he was only too anxious to begin. It was not his fault that circumstances compelled him to waste his time here in Adam's Rest. But there it was. What could he do now except wait for something to turn up? It was not even as if he were a single man, and free to adventure out. On the contrary, he had played the game with Janet, given her everything he had while he went on fighting; and the least her people could do now in return was to help them through this tight patch.

There was only one thing. Let no one talk to him about office work (he set his good-humoured mouth obstinately). He had humped his back over a ledger for ten years. It was enough. He had come to South Africa to escape from it. As he told Janet, he would rather go to jail than back to an office. Fortunately, he was not, at the moment, confronted with the alternative.

In the meantime, he amused the baby, rode about a little on Miriam's horse, learnt to use a boat, and played a fair amount of billiards at the Empire Hotel. He was always pleasant and cheerful; and when he needed a little money, which was really not often, he borrowed a pound or two from Mr. Lincoln and noted the loan down carefully.

The year lengthened; winter was over; spring came tip-toeing along, knocked gently, asking in a whisper if he might come in; the air rustled soft and silken . . .

Martin carried out his bed and put it under the pepper tree in the corner of the yard.

CHAPTER XII

§ 1

THE country was flaccid with the reaction after the war, and even the ladies of Adam's Rest had lost their public spirit. They were no longer interested in their native relief work, and Miriam found herself deprived, not only of the opportunity of exercising that romantically sacrificial spirit of hers, but also of the mere physical satisfaction occupation gave her. She could not go on working without support—she could not feed the natives if no one provided any food; it was useless to consider doing anything else while they were hungry. . . .

The old problem of what to do with herself rose up once more to torment her. Through the warm days of spring and summer she lay under the trees by the river, reading and brooding. There seemed no need for her in the world.

And she was twenty-five. She remembered how, with the arrogance of seventeen, she had assigned the end of the quarter century as the limit of the period of youth. After twenty-four, she had told herself, one replaced the irresponsibilities and gaieties of youth with the settled thoughts and habits of a decorous maturity. But here she was twenty-five, and neither of these things had happened to her. She had not had the irresponsibilities and gaieties of youth, and the settled thoughts and habits of a decorous maturity had not duly appeared to offer her the tribute of their consolation.

She still wanted her youth, needed and demanded her youth.

She thought of Janet. Janet's chief characteristic was her ability to live in the present. She had no unnamable yearnings. Miriam, in Janet's position, living awkwardly at her father's home with a husband and child, and without future prospects, would have tortured herself with humiliating thoughts and pessimistic imaginings. But Janet accepted her situation unquestioningly. She was fairly comfortable. She had her husband and child. The past had looked after itself. So would the future. Meanwhile, her life was not disagreeable, and so, as she often said, why worry?

Janet had never had obsessions about what she was to do with herself. What, she had sometimes pointed out to Miriam, did other people do with themselves? One took what came.

Now, why could not she, Miriam, feel the same way? Why could not she, for instance, be content with the magistrate's clerk, his meagre hopes of advancement, and accept his offer of marriage? He was an honest, clean-living young fellow, not bad to look at, and he certainly played an excellent game of tennis. Men had been married for less. As Janet put it: "Of course, Miriam, if you want to remain an old maid, it's no use talking. But if you want to marry and have a home of your own, what are you waiting for? I don't believe you are the kind of person who ever falls in love, and I know you're not thinking about that so much; but if you have the idea that he's simply not good enough, well, Miriam, are you expecting royalties to come to Adam's Rest for you to choose from?"

There flashed across Miriam's mind her childhood's vision of herself in a ruby-coloured dress (with a long train) reviewing that selected line of admirers. She smiled; and Janet, regarding her sister's enigmatic expression with impatience, said: "I don't know why you think it's so funny. But I see I'm wasting my breath. Only don't say I never warned you."

"No, I won't blame you for not warning me," Miriam promised. "For all I know, you may be quite right. As father says, who can tell what will prove, twenty years hence, to have been the right thing to do?"

§ 2

However, every one in Adam's Rest agreed a year, if not twenty years hence, that Miriam had been wise to wait, even to the advanced age of twenty-six. "She was always a clever girl," they said.

For Miriam made what, in Adam's Rest, was accounted a highly successful marriage.

Yet she herself felt it to be an affair, not so much successful, as mysterious and dreamlike. It could not be to her—she often told herself—that this thing had happened; that, in this small, tucked-away place she should have found this love people spoke of, a man whom she could love to love her. There she sat brooding beside the river bank, her life dull and aimless, and suddenly that had come to it which made it full of colour and significance. Now nothing was the same any more. She wondered if here was the whole quest of what she had thought to be her spiritual searching—her mooning, as Janet called it—this world-old craving for love, for a mate. Was it only the urge of sex after all—the thing she had despised in Janet and Martin?

She made an emotional gesture of defiance. Well, what if it was? Who was she to rise superior to the ordinary instincts of humanity, to spurn the message of a hundred thousand poets? Let love be a delusion—an artifice of Nature—what did she care? There it was though, there it was, and she asked for nothing better.

§ 3

Nevertheless, she did not disguise from herself that she was building her future on a solid foundation of feasibility. She was honest enough to admit that there were things besides love for which women married. The wonder was that she, Miriam, was getting them, and love, too. How many women there were who married only for those things; and how many women there were who married for nothing at all! She had but to look round Adam's Rest. The time came for a woman to marry, and she married. Neither for love nor for any practical advantage, but simply because it was her destiny to marry. Miriam reflected how the greatest souls and the greatest writings pitied the women who yielded themselves for love, and the women who sold themselves for cash—the women who, at least, made a bargain. But who pitied the women who gave themselves—their whole lives—for nothing?

Miriam was so happy that she pitied everybody.

She traced it all back to its beginnings. Her thoughts ran out and brought her a series of pictures—a simple story after all; a smooth, quiet affair—nothing like Janet's and Martin's sudden romance.

She had gone out riding one afternoon in the direction of Hugo's farm, and a man had come riding towards her, a tall, thin man, neutral-tinted, with smooth, darkish hair, and brown eyes that were more friendly and honest—and yet more keen—than any eyes Miriam had known before.

He had greeted her and stopped his horse.

"I see you don't remember me, Miss Lincoln."

But, of course, she did. This was Conrad Hugo, Dr. Hugo, one of the Hugos of what was the originally big farm, Hugo's Geluk. He had been away from the district for the last ten years, and even before that Miriam had seen him seldom. Conrad and his brother had not gone to school in Adam's Rest. They had passed through the hands of a private teacher on the farm to boarding-school, thence to college, and, finally, overseas.

But the Adam's Rest people had always been interested in the Hugos, and had followed their movements.

Miriam smiled her contradiction of his opening.

"When did you get back?" she asked.

He turned his horse, and they went on riding together. He told her then that, after leaving Edinburgh, he had been at a London hospital, and also in Vienna. "At first I didn't want to be in South Africa during the War. You know my position—a British subject two generations back, of Dutch extraction. I couldn't take one side against the other. But, later on, I did a little work at the concentration camps. I felt I could quite fairly undertake that."

"And what are you going to do now?"

"Work, I hope."

"But where?"

"That's my problem. I wish you would tell me."

He was smiling, but his voice was serious.

At the thought that he was free to choose his place anywhere in the large world, free to meet the women of that world and speak to them as easily as he was now speaking to her, while here she remained tied to Adam's Rest and virgin solitude—at the thought of his manhood and her womanhood—a fine pain drilled itself like a thin needle into Miriam's heart. Of course, he would go away to some large place.

"What am I to say?" she asked.

"What you think. I want advice."

"From me?"

It was too much to hope for, and yet it really seemed as if he did want advice from her.

She answered him honestly.

"I think you ought to go to one of the large towns, of course."

"Why?"

"Well, doesn't it seem the obvious future for an ambitious man?"

"But you forget something," he pointed out to her. "You forget my farm here. I came back to find it neglected and going to pieces. Do you know my farm?"

"I've passed it."

"I wish you'd come there with me one day. And it's mine, my share of what my father left. Well, I don't say it's a big affair. But my heart is in it. I love my little patch of the earth's surface. It gives me a romantic feeling to think that a bit of this world spinning about in the universe is, as human things go, my own."

He spoke with simple intimacy.

"Yes, I understand that," she said.

"And then, considering it practically, I think it could be made to pay. But that means I must keep my own eye on the place. I needn't tell you what bijwoners are."

"Do you know Freddie Croft?" asked Miriam unexpectedly.

"Croft? Freddie? Ought I to know him?"

"He *keeps* himself white, don't you remember?"

"That little coloured fellow at Redford's store? Of course! And he still keeps himself white, does he?"

"Whiter than ever. He's married the daughter of your bijwoner, old du Toit. That's what made me think of him."

"Magdalena? She was a child when I left. So she's married Freddie Croft, who keeps himself white. And that's the way the black blood spreads through South Africa. . . . Well, don't let's talk about them now. I was telling you why I'm drawn to Adam's Rest. There's my farm, to begin with. Even more strongly, there's the fact that I hate big towns. In London and Vienna and Edinburgh I could never be alone. I could never escape from people or the habitations of people. The sun rose and set behind houses and not behind hills." He indicated the landscape around him with a sweep of his arm. "I missed this bareness. Here, for all I can see to the contrary, the whole world, the whole universe even, belongs to me alone."

"You can see me to the contrary," Miriam said.

"Now you point it out—yes, so I can," he admitted. "Then have half the universe, will you?"

The little thin needle drilled itself deeper into her heart. She wished some such man as this—she did not go so far as to concentrate her thought precisely on Conrad Hugo—yet that some such man would indeed offer her half his universe.

They rode for a while without further talk.

"But don't you feel that way yourself?" he asked her presently.

"You mean, do I care to be alone? No, I don't. When I'm alone, I am lonely. Nothing else."

His voice, when he answered, held a note of great friendliness.

"Yes, I suppose a woman is different. And then I've the blood of people who could not bear to see the next man's smoke. I want elbow room."

He moved his elbows out slightly on each side as if he were edging away invisible forces.

"But that's sentimental," he added. "The fact is, I must look after my farm and earn my living as well as try to make myself happy. Don't you agree I must look after my farm? Can't a man be a doctor-farmer? Is that more contemptible than to be a gentleman-farmer or just a doctor?"

"Not more contemptible. But—" She was arguing against her own need; yet, partly, she was arguing that way because of her need.

"Yes?"

"If you are both a doctor and a farmer, doesn't it mean you can give only half your mind to each thing?"

"It may mean I can double my mind. However, you see now why I am thinking of settling in Adam's Rest and not in one of the big towns." He shook his reins slightly. "Perhaps you'd come along to the farm now?" he suggested.

"I think it's time for me to go home," said Miriam.

"Then that's the way I was riding originally."

They turned their horses.

"And now you'll tell me about yourself, as I have told you about myself," he said.

§ 4

Dr. Hugo came to visit the Lincolns a few days later. He sat in the airy, comfortable, and shabby living-room with its old leather arm-chairs and sofa, its family pictures, it jackal skin rugs, talking in his easy and friendly fashion with Mr. Lincoln.

"Perhaps your daughter has told you," he said, "that I am considering settling down in Adam's Rest? What do you think about it?"

Mr. Lincoln smiled. "You mustn't ask me. You know my point of view. I haven't left Adam's Rest for a generation myself."

"Your daughter suggests I ought to practise in one of the bigger towns. It's unambitious of me not to want to, isn't it?"

He seemed to put forward Miriam's opinion quite naturally, Mr. Lincoln could not help noticing.

"It would be more interesting, medically speaking," he conceded.

"On the other hand, what about work among the natives? They're eaten up with disease."

Mr. Lincoln looked at him with surprise.

"Don't I know that! But is it work you'd care for? And then, is it calculated to keep a man up to the mark?" He stopped as Miriam brought in the tea. "Miriam here could tell you something about the Kaffirs," he added.

"Yes. I've heard. I know what you've done, Miss Lincoln. I see it everywhere."

His honest brown eyes met hers. She felt as if he had stood up and warmly clasped her hand. It was actually the happiest moment of her life. But she hardly knew what to say. It seemed to her that she did not deserve unstinted approbation.

"I did it largely," she offered, a little wistfully, "because I was bored in Adam's Rest, and had nothing else to do."

"But not altogether for that reason," said Dr. Hugo, understanding her at once.

"No, not altogether for that reason," Miriam responded, glad that, having defined her position, she could now take his tribute.

Janet and Martin came in for tea. Janet was going to have another child, and Martin was still waiting for Fortune to come and find him, but they were both quite happy and hopeful. They lacked nothing essential. And, as for the future—things must right themselves sometime.

Mr. Lincoln introduced his son-in-law.

He found himself aloofly comparing the two men. Martin was a good fellow, of course, wouldn't harm a soul, but Mr. Lincoln could not help wishing that he were not quite so complacent, not quite so amiably ready to take without giving in return. It seemed to argue a certain coarseness of spirit. His month's holiday had already extended into nearly six, but he still maintained his care-free holiday mood. He had not even offered to assist his father-in-law with his books. And, bringing the matter down to bedrock, that was really what Mr. Lincoln resented. If the man could not find work—well, the country was slack, and the labour supply greatly exceeded the demand. A more energetic personality might, of course, have had better success in the search for something to do, still—one could find an excuse. But to stay on month after month, to stay with his wife and child, to see the older man working at a task which he himself was qualified to do, and never to make the faintest suggestion of assistance—that was one of the few things that had proved too strong for Mr. Lincoln's philosophical habit.

He looked from Martin, a robust, good-looking animal, a thickish kind of man, both mentally and physically, to Conrad, with his thin, sensitive face, and his brown eyes, simultaneously keen and kind; and it seemed to him strange to see men touching hands whose spirits lived on such different planes.

It struck him suddenly that the difference was really the difference between Miriam and Janet. He looked from Conrad to Miriam. . . . Well, why not?

§ 5

It was as if it had been prearranged in all its little details, and was now working itself out to its inevitable conclusion—so serenely and peacefully, through such green and pleasant pastures, the lives of these two flowed towards each other, met and mingled. Six months after that first greeting on the veld Miriam and Conrad were married. Their love had not been the tumultuous affair of Janet and Martin. As Janet said to Miriam: "You might have been married for twenty years, the calm, settled look you have together."

"Or even a thousand years," Miriam answered mysteriously.

There was a little frown between Janet's eyes. Miriam always said such peculiar things.

CHAPTER XIII

§ 1

JANET'S second child was also born in her father's home, but her husband was no longer there. Martin was working. It was not the kind of work he had originally visualised himself as doing, nor, indeed, was it anything in the shape of a commercial undertaking at all. But he had found himself, as it were, spiritually edged towards it. It might have been a casual word from Dr. Hugo, an expression on Mr. Lincoln's face as Martin noted down one of his periodical small loans, a silence on the part of Aunt Laura as he ate his hearty breakfast, eventually perhaps a prod from Janet herself—it might have been the cumulative effect of all of these that finally lifted Martin from his rut of contented idleness.

And, in the end, Martin had gone diamond digging.

It was characteristic of him that, once the idea of doing so had firmly embedded itself in his mind, he could see no possible obstacle to his success as a digger. He calculated expenses and postulated chances, and he optimistically balanced one against the other. When Mr. Lincoln suggested to him that one could not mathematically set a certainty against a hope, he waved him aside with a sound aphorism: "A man who can't take a chance isn't worth his salt."

"Yes," Mr. Lincoln felt inclined to say, "but does that hold if he makes other people take the chance for him?"

For the point of the matter was that Martin wanted his father-in-law to lend him a hundred pounds to start him as a digger. "I promise," he said earnestly, "to pay you back within the first six months."

And, however Mr. Lincoln argued against the practicability of such a promise, to that statement Martin held. "Give me six months," he persisted. "That's all I ask. You'll see."

He rode over to Baboon's Gully, a diggings about twenty miles from Adam's Rest, to "have a look round."

He came back to Mr. Lincoln with a list of his requirements neatly tabulated. His training as a clerk had enabled him to produce quite a pretty document. There was the cost of working materials—sieves, buckets, shovels, picks, a windlass, a "baby" (a cradle-like affair for separating sand from pebbles)—nothing very elaborate: it was only in later days that diggers began to work on an important scale. . . . There was the pay for a few native "boys." There was his own living. These last two items were calculated for three months. "I ought to have found *something* by then," Martin explained.

Mr. Lincoln was surprised and a little touched to see how moderate Martin's personal demands were. "You can't live on this," he said. "Why not?" Martin answered. "What do I need money for? I'm not a drinking man."

It was true. Martin was not a drinking man. Nor, apparently, had he any other vices—unless one substituted for the rather amiable word "laziness" the uglier word "slothfulness." Martin's worst form of dissipation was his daily game of billiards.

On the other hand, he had certain positive virtues. He never lost his temper and seldom spoke evil of any one. He was one of those rare people who rejoice in another's good fortune. He never tortured himself with disheartening comparisons. He had no envy in him. He was quite truthful. And, as regards money, he was inclined to spend it if he had it; but if his pocket was empty, he was prepared to rub along without it—that is, he was satisfied to manage with the most modest of small loans. It was really one of the phases of his general good-nature that he never had any hesitation in taking from the next man anything he felt he needed. "Wouldn't I do as much for him if I had the chance?" he told himself. But, practically, his motto in life worked out as follows: "Let others do unto me as I would do unto them."

For Martin's chief weakness lay in his unfailing optimism; in that gift he shared with Janet of seeing what he chose to see, and of ignoring such facts as might make for unpleasantness.

Now he spoke as confidently about his luck at digging as if it were a monthly salary paid by an employer into his pocket.

§ 2

In the meantime, Janet was to remain at home. The new baby was due in a month. But there was no difficulty about that since Miriam was now married, and there was, accordingly, another room to spare. "But as soon," said Martin, "as I can scrape together the money, we'll build ourselves a little house at Adam's Rest. It will be better for you to be here than at the diggings. And, of course, I'll come over for the week-ends."

He arrived home the first week-end triumphant and excited. His claim, every one said, was wonderful. He talked professionally about stripping ground, about Cape rubies and bantams, about washes. "In a fortnight I'll be washing. I might find something in the very first sieve. You never know. They talk about a greenhorn's luck. Why, just look at my claim for a beginning. It's the envy of all the old hands."

But months passed before he found anything, and then the stones were so small that they realised hardly a week's expenses. He was compelled to apply to his father-in-law for another loan. This time Mr. Lincoln hesitated. "I'm afraid I can't do it, Martin," he said. "I am not a rich man, as you know. And then there were the expenses in connection with the baby. And, again, Miriam's wedding. It's not," he added, "as if there were anything definite about this digging. If I thought that, I would make a sacrifice and let you have whatever money you needed. But, it seems to me, as often as not, you might as well dig in a bottomless pit as dig for diamonds."

Martin's good-humoured face settled into heavy lines.

"You forget one point," he said. "If I don't go on with the digging, I have nothing else to do either."

"You might get a clerical post."

They both knew that it was wasting breath to discuss such a thing, but Martin went through the polite formula of considering his father-in-law's suggestion.

"I might," he said. "But if I did, I'd stand no chance of ever repaying you the money I have already borrowed."

It was a sound argument. Mr. Lincoln countered it weakly. "Something will be realised by selling your working materials."

"Not half of what I paid for them. And, besides, if I once go back to an office, I'm done for life. I can never again be anything but a salaried man living in some one else's pocket, and at some one else's mercy."

His voice took on a pleading note. "I'll bring down my working expenses as far as I possibly can. I know it's asking a lot that you should keep on lending me money. But let me have my chance. I'm on a new claim now. I haven't even begun to work out the ground yet. It would be more than I could stand to give it up and leave my luck for the next man."

His tones deepened persuasively. "Look here, twenty pounds will see me through. It's not so much to ask, is it? twenty pounds. And if I don't find anything by the time that's used up—well, you can send me to break stones if you like, and I promise to do it."

There was a certain charm about Martin—a kind of permanently young and eager simplicity, as if he were putting the whole of his fate into the other man's hands. It was difficult to refuse Martin a request without feeling that his trust and dependence were being betrayed.

"It's not the matter of the twenty pounds," said Mr. Lincoln, feeling that, indeed, he was not asking so very much, and involuntarily yielding. "I don't mind lending you the money. But it's the uncertainty of the whole affair. And then I want to see Janet definitely settled. With two children you can't afford to leave your livelihood to chance. On the other hand, I never took any chances myself, and I have not made what the world would consider a brilliant success of my life. For my own part, I was satisfied with a small security; but I realise that all people aren't built alike. So I'm not really entitled to give you any advice. For all I know, your way of thinking may be better than my way. . . ."

He smiled, and Martin smiled back with his manner of wistful boyishness.

"If you look in the top right-hand drawer of my desk," said Mr. Lincoln, "you'll find my cheque-book. Please bring it to me. I have my fountain pen here."

§ 3

Whether it was to be eventually a good thing or a bad thing who could, at the time, tell? But the week after Martin borrowed the twenty pounds from his father-in-law, he found a substantial stone. It weighed twenty carats, and he received for it two hundred and fifty pounds. He paid Mr. Lincoln back the original hundred pounds he had borrowed to begin digging ("I'll clear off all the other small amounts next time," he said), and he engaged two coloured men to build him a small four-roomed house. Henry Croft came over to make the doors and window-fittings, the shelves and cupboards. The hundred and fifty pounds Martin had left did not suffice to complete the house and its internal arrangements. But, at least, he could make a good beginning; and he allowed the work to go on in the certainty that, by the time the money he had in hand was exhausted, he would have found more diamonds. He was on a good patch, and had barely touched the washable ground his claim held.

Nevertheless, he did not again find anything in that claim, and, to finish the building of the house, and buy some furniture, and pay off his accumulating debts, he had to approach his brother-in-law for a loan. He noted it down as carefully as was his custom, and offered Conrad his house as security. "You may think that I am not getting results from my digging, but, at least, I have that—the house—to show for it. That is something solid, it gives me a kind of position. For instance, I can borrow money on it. I can go to a man and make a business deal. No favour, mind you. A transaction. I can say 'Lend me so much and so much at such and such interest (whatever the current rate may be). Here is my house as security.' "

He looked at Conrad with a naïve pride in his business capacity.

"And," said Conrad, "if you don't pay him—in this case, me—he, that is I, can turn you out, of course."

"I suppose so," admitted Martin.

"And then I can ask you and your family to make your home with us, seeing that you will be left homeless. It will naturally be my duty."

Martin looked at Conrad with a puzzled smile.

"My dear man," said Conrad, "I don't think it will pay me to exercise any mortgages over you. So don't let us talk about securities and interest. You can have the money, and you will, of course, pay me back as soon as you can. That is all I ask. Except that I wish you would give up this digging. It's not going to do any of us any good, as far as I can see. But I know what a digger is. He won't throw away the chance of making a thousand pounds in a day for the certainty of getting twenty pounds a month every month. And I can't say I altogether blame him. So it's no use my giving you any advice really."

"That is what I always say myself," Martin put in eagerly. "It's the chance digging gives a fellow."

"Besides," added Conrad meditatively, "a man needn't kill himself with work on the diggings, need he? as long as there are Kaffirs knocking around."

CHAPTER XIV

§ 1

This home-building of Martin's and Janet's received a zest from the fact that Conrad and Miriam had already, before their marriage, built themselves a home. But it was an entirely different affair from what Adam's Rest people were accustomed to consider a home. And, in fact, Martin and Janet, secure in their orthodoxy, rather sneered at it. In Adam's Rest, if one had the means, one built oneself a house of red brick (or even of unburnt brick), and covered it with a roof of corrugated iron. The essence of its being was a central passage. On one side of the passage, in front, was a sitting-room, and, behind that, a dining-room, and, behind the dining-room, a kitchen. On the other side was a principal bedroom, followed by another bedroom. At the end of the passage was a bathroom. And in front of the house was a verandah consisting of sheets of corrugated iron supported on thin wooden poles.

The first view one had of the interior of the house was a walnut hall-stand in the passage, laden with overcoats and old dusty hats. After that, one entered the sitting-room, which had an overmantel (but, instead of a fireplace, hangings), spindle-legged chairs and tables, pictures in pairs, lace curtains. The dining-room invariably had red wall-paper and a red plush tablecloth, and chairs covered in red, or, if one were poorer, simply bentwood chairs.

The principal bedroom was generally papered in pale blue or pale pink; and, on the big bed, under lace coverlets, were shams of pale blue or pale pink sateen to match the wall-paper. Those one took off at night. The bedroom furniture was of walnut, very ornamental, and with small swinging mirrors on the dressing-table. The second bedroom consisted of odds and ends of furniture, and a black iron bedstead.

Janet and Martin had not been able to carry out this scheme of furnishing completely. But the nucleus was there. They had the correct wall-paper to begin with, and a few of the main essentials, but the finished details of the scheme depended on the finding of another diamond.

Still, as far as it went, they were very pleased with their home. "I never had Miriam's romantic ideas," said Janet. "After all, if everybody is satisfied with this kind of house, and it's been proved to be comfortable and so on, what's the use of going in for silly experiments? But that's Miriam all over. She always must try to be different from everybody else."

§ 2

Janet had put the matter quite succinctly. Miriam certainly was romantic, and she actually did want to be different from other people.

Already, in the early days of their engagement, she had begun to plan their future home.

"Listen, Conrad," she said. "You have one regular, conventional house at the farm. We don't want another here at Adam's Rest."

"What is your idea?" said Conrad amicably.

"It isn't anything outrageously new. It has been done before, and proved successful. Only not in Adam's Rest, of course. But why shouldn't we lead rather than follow Adam's Rest?"

"Quite right," agreed Conrad. "Lead away."

"Well, my idea is," said Miriam, "to have rondavels. Four rondavels joined together by a few feet of passage. Each rondavel a separate room with its own doors and windows. White, of course. And a thatched roof."

"Yes. I know the kind of thing. Round rooms instead of square rooms. Glorified native huts."

"You are just being malicious now," said Miriam. "Try to see them as I do, on the river bank all in a row, with a background of trees. And no corrugated iron and no wall-papers. White and round inside and outside. So clean and simple——"

"And primitive and awkward," teased Conrad.

"Oh, well," said Miriam, "if you are not sympathetic about it, we'll have the regular thing. I can see you want a red dining-room and a passage. Have them then. Only don't ask me to strike a sentimental attitude about it and stand beside you with your arm around me and whisper 'our home.' "

As she conjured up the picture, she found herself suddenly smiling.

"You little dear," said Conrad. "If you'll only agree to the attitude, I'll agree to the house. Let it be rondavels, by all means."

§ 3

They settled down in their rondavels and were happy. Too happy, Miriam told herself, too happy. She lay awake at night and thought how sinful it was to be so happy. She tortured herself with her own selfishness, worried about things she had not done, or should have done differently. From the abundance of her own well-being she yearned over the troubles of the rest of the world. Her father, how old he was getting, and he had had so little from life. . . . Poor Aunt Laura, cheated by fate, with her scarred face, and her pathetic, staring eye—she was beginning to age, too, she was getting gray and irritable. Her womanhood had never been anything to her but a penance. And now her youth was quite gone. . . . And then Janet, always troubled financially. She did not even realise how precarious her position was, and that made it worse in a way. They could not go on getting further and further into debt. And, ultimately, what would happen to the whole family?

Miriam was sorry for every one. For the wretched Kaffirs, the hopeless bijwoners, even the aspiring Crofts. Was it, after all, their fault that they had black blood in them? How awful it was to be born damned. That boast of theirs—they *kept* themselves white, how pathetic! Miriam's own happiness made her soft towards every one else.

But that was only at night, listening to the noises of the lonely world outside. . . . In the daytime she was too briskly occupied for wistful reflections. She was giving all her energies to proving to Adam's Rest that her type of home was not only, under the conditions of life there, the most beautiful, but the wisest too. She spent endless days arranging and rearranging. She ordered a little furniture through catalogues, but most of it Henry Croft made under her direction, and she was for ever sending for him to come and assist her in some new scheme. Sometimes she was so tired that she could not rest but had to go on jumping up and running about to do something more and still something more.

And when all that was done, there was the garden. Miriam liked, as a setting for her rustic home with its background of native trees, coarse, vivid flowers—orange coloured, and bright scarlet, flowers. Things such as zinnias and dahlias and sunflowers and nasturtiums and geraniums and gaillardias and poppies. She filled her rooms with bowls of yellow, red, black-stained flowers, and her chintzes, too, were bold and barbaric; but the furniture of stinkwood and syringawood was heavy and plain almost to clumsiness against the white walls.

"I don't know how you have done it," Conrad told her. "You know I'm not artistic" (and, indeed, he had very little pictorial sense), "but it seems to me that, with all your crude furniture and vulgar flowers, there is a certain cool dignity, and even a certain daintiness, about the whole effect. Where do you get your ideas from, I'd like to know."

Miriam laughed exultantly.

"I thought I could do it. I thought I could do it!" she cried.

She no longer felt that her life was empty. Sometimes, at moments, it seemed to her that it was getting too crowded. That now, even if she wanted loneliness, she would never be alone again, that she would never any more belong to herself.

Yes, certainly, these days she was full of strange thoughts.

But Janet laughed at her. "Most women," she said from her maturer experience, "get queer fancies when they are going to have a child." . . .

CHAPTER XV

§ 1

AT the beginning of the year 1905, Miriam's child—a girl, was born, and she called her Isabel.

It pleased Janet to think that this child greatly resembled herself. "I wish she were mine," she always said. "Felix and Claude take after Martin entirely. But I wonder if Martin was ever such a little devil as they are. They can't sit still, they're always in trouble. They drive me mad sometimes."

Miriam smiled to see Janet sitting there in her placid maternity saying serenely that her children drove her mad.

"You needn't wish for a dearer child than Felix," she said.

And, indeed, Felix had an extraordinary charm. He was, to begin with, beautiful. He had a thick mass of straight, golden-brown hair; big dark eyes; a golden-brown skin behind which the blood flowed strongly; a chin dented like his father's. Janet was right when she said that her children resembled Martin. But there was a vivid quality in Felix, a zest, an eagerness, a passion, that had not descended on him from Martin. At four years of age it was already possible to see the kind of man Felix was destined to become. To-day his wants, his sorrows, his joys, were the wants and sorrows and joys of childhood, but he threw his heart into them as later he would throw his heart into the wants and sorrows and joys of manhood. It was a habit of mind that was different from Janet's and Martin's attitude of rather indolent self-indulgence—perhaps a kind of sublimation of it. There was a sort of poetic ecstasy in his small soul that was nothing like their cheerful complacency. And yet, again, Miriam remembered the circumstances of their impulsive mating. They, too, had had their moment of ecstasy.

Sometimes it seemed to Miriam that Felix was not so much a child as a spirit. Only a day or two ago she had seen him tensely watching a sunset, and she had been suddenly afraid because he was so wistfully beautiful.

Miriam's thoughts turned to her own child. She lay asleep in the perambulator beside her, a plump and pink little human thing. Miriam smoothed the coverlet that lightly protected her with yearning hands. What did life hold for the child she herself had fashioned?

Janet was speaking. "There's Susie Maxwell and her little girl walking along the river bank. Shall I call them to come and have a look at baby? After all, Susie was at school with you. It would be the decent thing to do."

Miriam nodded, and Janet beckoned to Susie. Susie approached with that modest respectfulness which was her habitual attitude towards completely white people. She was not to-day very reminiscent of the small girl who had thought it exquisite repartee to taunt the Lincoln children by mocking their aunt's misfortune. Susie Croft had been a rather unpleasant child, given to lying and suggestive whispering. Miriam always thought of her with retrospective dislike. But Susie had grown up to be eminently respectable. She was clean, neat, decorous, modest, unobtrusive. All the people of Adam's Rest spoke well of her and gave her a measure of condescending attention. Many of them had once been schoolmates of hers, and now they stopped her in The Street and told her it was hot, and asked her how her children were getting on at school. Susie agreed that it was hot and said that her children were getting on very well. There, without further effort on Susie's part to maintain it, the conversation generally ended. That was why, for a woman in her station in life, Susie was approved of. She never presumed to greet any one before she was greeted, never decided on her own initiative that it was hot, never offered, without invitation, to discuss her children's progress at school. She appeared to be grateful for such notice as she received, and to understand that she was not entitled to more. She was like Henry (still as industrious as ever, and with a persistently increasing black family) in that respect, and unlike Carrie and Freddie.

She came towards Miriam and Janet now, the little girl, Frances, following her in the leisurely way she had. As she came nearer, Miriam, who had not been in close contact with Mrs. Maxwell for months, was surprised to see the trail of the passing years on her face. For the first time Miriam noticed that Susie positively did not look a young woman any more. And how old was she then? Not much more than a year older than Miriam herself—barely thirty. A little fear fluttered against Miriam's heart. The years were getting dangerously many. She felt suddenly as if they—the years—

were separate entities struggling against her. At first they had come gently, a few little tiny years. They had come and played with her. Then more of them had appeared—noisy, merry fellows—and they had danced with her and made love to her. She looked into the future, and saw their numbers swelling, and now a sullen year came and now a cruel one. And sometimes they threatened her and sometimes they hurt her and sometimes they deceived her by pretending that they were getting less powerful. But they kept on coming, more and more of them. Now soon they would begin to weary her—she could not hold so many years at bay. Then she would wait for their onslaught, would try to repulse them by cunning and strategy, would fail, would stumble and fall. They would grow stronger while she grew weaker. They would bear her down altogether—a horde of them now—would trample on her, lying in the dust prostrate. She would plead with them, ask them to stand back a little, to let her breathe. And they would laugh at her malignantly. They would kick the breath out of her, the life out of her. And among them there would be those years which had played with her and those which had danced with her and those which had seemed friendly to her—all the years, all of them, jeering at her now and spurning her. . . .

Susie Maxwell was smiling her polite and reticent smile. Just so much might she smile at a really white woman. It had to be an exact thing, that smile. A little less would signify ungratefulness of the condescension that had evoked it, a little more pushfulness. She had been a chubby-faced small girl, but now her face was thin, and her mouth had deep lines on each side as she smiled. Miriam looked at her, wistful of the passing of time, as she leaned over the perambulator and said all the appropriate things. She smoothed her sleeping baby's fine hair softly away from her forehead, and, for a moment, defied Time. Let the years come. Here was reinforcement.

"When she wakes," said Susie's little daughter in her slow sing-song, "can I play with her?"

Miriam remembered how, four years ago, she had come upon Frances laboriously pushing the perambulator with Felix in it. What a picture she had made standing there in the glare of the street in her bright pink dress and sun-bonnet. She was still a very pretty child with her velvet-black eyes, a little shadowed underneath, her round face, and alluring lips.

Susie made as if to go.

"Can I stay till the baby wakes, ma?" asked Frances again.

"If Mrs. Hugo doesn't mind," said Susie. For years now she had not addressed Miriam by her Christian name, although Miriam still called her Susie.

"Yes, do let her stay, if she wants to," said Miriam.

Mrs. Maxwell smiled her appreciation of the privilege. "Well, good-bye, Mrs. Hugo. Good-bye, Mrs. Webster," she said. But having spoken her farewell, she remained standing indecisively. "Have you heard the news?" she asked presently.

"No, what?" said Janet, always interested in a little gossip.

"Auntie Carrie's come back," Frances forestalled her mother, in her slow but subtly charged voice. "She's staying at Gra'ma's place, and she's got another little girl."

"Yes," Susie put in, "Carrie has had a hard time."

"And what has become of Mr. Lowe?" Janet asked frankly.

Susie shook her head.

"We haven't heard from him since the day Carrie left Adam's Rest."

She hesitated a moment, said good-bye, and walked away.

"Must be that soldier's child," said Janet. "Carrie must have gone through a thing or two with him. I wonder how she'll face it out in Adam's Rest."

Frances sat down on a stone beneath a wacht-een-bietje tree, waiting for the baby to wake. The river flowed, swollen and heavy, beside her. The sun was fiercely blue and cloudless, the air a quivering brightness.

Frances, in a short white dress, clasped her brown knees with her slender brown hands. Her hair fell straight and black on either side of her face. She smiled the smile that was as slow as her speech. It seemed to Miriam that there was something mysteriously significant and sphinx-like about the small figure.

PART II

CHAPTER I

§ 1

ADAM'S REST was growing. In the decade following the Boer War a number of things happened to it. The railway line was extended right up to the village, and a station naturally accompanied it. A public tennis court was made. A bioscope hall was built and films were shown there nightly, except when a dance or an election meeting or some equally important function needed the accommodation of the hall, and diverted the attention of the public. A telephone exchange marked the latest advance of civilisation and connected Adam's Rest directly with the rest of the world. It had a staff of two, and the junior member of the staff was Susie Maxwell's daughter, Frances. She had left school at the age of fifteen, and had now for two years been in the telephone office.

Other things had happened, too—adventures and adventurers—but they had not left a permanent mark on the face of Adam's Rest.

For instance, there had been an attempt made to dredge the river for diamonds. Men had come along with a diving-bell, with Kaffirs, with complex gears, with boundless hopes, to gather up the diamonds that lay in the bed of the river. If diamonds beside the river, why not diamonds in the river? Here and there men had most laboriously made breakwaters and scraped about in the naked river-bed. They had been fairly successful. But, obviously, they had been restricted in their efforts. They could only make breakwaters in the shallow parts of the river, and they could only work in winter when the water was low. For in summer the river, fed by the Transvaal rains, changed its character entirely. One day it was crawling along, timid and apologetic; the next day it bore down, swollen and aggressive, like a beggar who has been left a fortune overnight.

Now, consider, if one could work in the bed of the river, unrestricted as to time and place. . . . If one could delve where it was deepest, where diamonds should be thickest. . . . Why, there must be diamonds enough in those secret places to light up the whole world! . . .

And yet, not a diamond had been brought forth. One thing had happened, and another thing had happened; money had been found, and money had been lost; people had laughed and people had wept; but it had never been proved whether the adventurers were right or whether they were wrong. The river had fooled them and kept its secret. It alone knew if it held in its depths a fortune or a phantasy. . . .

It had been a great excitement for Adam's Rest. But it had passed and the memory of it had faded and Adam's Rest had fallen back on itself, on its own way of life and the meaning of it.

One looked. Time went on, and nothing seemed to change, and yet everything was changing. A child was born and a day passed and nothing was different, and another day passed and nothing was different, and another day and another day and another day, and nothing was ever different. And yet it was all different. Everything was different, every one was different. The child was no longer a child, the young man was no longer young, the old man was no longer old, he was no longer there at all.

But one looked again. And this time, conversely, everything seemed to change. And yet nothing was changing. Each day something happened, but, in the end, nothing ever was different. It was true that the child was no longer a child, and the young man was no longer young, and the old man was no longer old—no longer there at all. But then it began all over again. The child, the young man and the old man. Everything was always the same. Every one was always the same.

§ 2

Mr. Lincoln was still in his chemist-shop, still making up liquids and powders, still interested in ancient history, still taking his morning walks beside the river. But his hair was a paler gray than it once had been, his face, too, was a paler gray, even his eyes seemed to be a paler gray. He looked now as if he must have been a very fair young man; and yet, except for his gray eyes, he had been dark, with hair almost black, and a sallow skin. But as he passed into the sixties, his eyes combined with his age and his gray hair to give that illusion of fairness.

He was now one of the old inhabitants of Adam's Rest, but he had never yet, despite the advance of the railway, been farther away from Adam's Rest than

Dr. Hugo's farm, a distance of about ten miles. Miriam had several times urged him to take a seaside holiday. But he had resisted in his mild, firm way. "I have never been ill in my life. I feel as well to-day as I did thirty years ago. This place agrees with me in every respect. I don't want to move from it any more than that old tree there wants to move. And I get, as he does, all the change I want every year when summer changes to winter, and when winter changes to summer."

Aunt Laura was still keeping house for him, although a legacy had made her financially independent. And she was generally happier now than she had been for many years. She had given up questioning and struggling and resisting. She had accepted her destiny. She had surrendered. It did not matter any more that her face sagged on one side, and her eye was too round. She was strong and vigorous, and, whereas at thirty-five she had felt that she was growing old, at fifty-five it seemed to her that she was really still quite young. She enjoyed the passing day, was interested in her food, in her clothes, in her housekeeping, in a book with a happy ending, in pleasant gossip, and, mildly, in current events. The bioscope was a great pleasure to her, and she went regularly twice a week, at every change of programme. Sometimes Mr. Lincoln went with her. Mr. Lincoln had gradually brought himself shamefacedly to admit that he enjoyed a good film. "Now," he excused himself to Miriam, "I don't have to go into the world. The world is brought to me."

But both Mr. Lincoln and Aunt Laura found their chief interests in the new generation. There were now three young Websters—all boys. In Miriam's home Isabel was still the only child. A second child had died at birth, and it had been destined that there should be no others.

Without doubt or the possibility of disguise, Felix was every one's favourite. It sometimes hurt Miriam to see how much more interesting and attractive—how altogether much more successful Felix was than her own child. And not only Felix, but even his brothers. Her father and her aunt might strive as they would at impartiality, it was impossible for them to feel towards Isabel as they did towards Janet's boys—or to seem to do so. Any excess of affection they displayed towards her only accentuated the absence of genuine feeling.

It was not that Isabel was lacking in the physical essentials of childhood—she was big, and pretty in a rosy kind of way. Only—she was entirely without charm. She was simply a piece of healthy flesh. She was at her best, newly-dressed for the afternoon, walking sturdily down The Street, her legs plump, her face pink and shiny, though uninterested and spiritless, her hair a glistening yellow. That was as much as any one, except her parents, wanted to see of Isabel. Even those people who naturally gravitated towards children found themselves bored with her.

However Miriam yearned towards her own, she could not help wishing that Isabel had a little of the eagerness that animated Janet's boys. It seemed an inexplicable dispensation that to her, Miriam, and to no one else, should have been given this stolid child with the open-mouthed stare.

And once, in a moment of bitterness, she crystallised this feeling in words. She said to her husband: "I foresee Isabel's future. She is going to be the girl who gets the good conduct prize at school."

Dr. Hugo answered: "Poor child."

CHAPTER II

§ 1

Martin Webster was still digging at Baboon's Gully. But he had not been digging there uninterruptedly all the time. There had been a splendid interlude.

He had continued for years finding a little, paying off a few debts, making other debts, going with long blanks, threatening to throw up the whole business, finding again and beginning the old round afresh.

Nearly every week-end he spent with his family in Adam's Rest. He used to make the twenty-mile journey on horseback, and always, as he approached, his little sons would run out to meet him, yelling their eager welcome: "Here's Daddy! Hallo, Daddy! Did you find anything this week, Daddy?"

He would slacken pace, and they would clutch at his feet in their stirrups. "Lift me up on to the saddle, Daddy!"

"Shut up, Claude! It's my turn this week. You had your turn last week."

"No! Me! Me!" the youngest would urge.

Martin would lift one up, and there he would sit, the lucky fellow, gripping the horse's mane, with a red, intent face; and the other two would trot alongside shouting out the home news.

If at no other time, then, during these week-ends, Martin was a big, glorious figure. His children thought him unsurpassable. He used to give them toys and sweets, and cut them whistles out of pumpkin-stalks, and take them bathing, and let them clamber over him and pull him about. He used to mend their little broken shoes.

Sometimes he passed the week-end slackly, but sometimes he did odd jobs about the house, things his solitary digging-life had taught him to do: carpentering and soldering work, and spade work in the garden.

Nobody, the boys thought, could do so many things as their father. They were completely satisfied with him.

But his wife, her adult relations, the people in Adam's Rest generally, knew that Martin was deteriorating. The life he led was entirely physical—and not even strenuously physical. All the labouring part of digging was done by his Kaffirs. His own work consisted of superintending them and of sorting for diamonds. The only exercise he took was his periodical leisurely ride to Adam's Rest. He was getting stout—coarsening altogether—and his good looks were leaving him. His face was too full, and his settled sunburn made it look fuller still. He was losing his hair, too, shaved only twice a week, and rather neglected his teeth. And his hands were thick and hard and shiny outside, and rough and seamed inside. He had no mental or spiritual relaxation at Baboon's Gully, unless an occasional game of cards might be counted as such. He never read a book and not always a newspaper. He was not interested in current affairs. His conversation with the other diggers consisted simply of perpetual boasting about his children and about his paternal efforts. Every time he came back from a week-end in Adam's Rest he had fresh stories to tell of their doings and sayings. They were the only things in the world that really interested him, and he never doubted but that other people found them equally interesting. Even if it had entered his mind that he was boring his friends, he would not have stopped talking about his children. He enjoyed doing so, and the habit had grown on him.

One of his favourite sayings was: "I'm sacrificing myself living here on the diggings, but my boys are worth it." Or, again, "If it hadn't been for those youngsters of mine, I needn't have stuck here all these years. I could have saved my money and gone into business like anybody else."

All the men he spoke to knew just exactly how much he could have made and how much he could have saved, but they never contradicted him.

"I always had a head for business," he would continue. "Before I came out to South Africa in the Volunteers I had quite a good post in London. But that's the way it goes. Parents have to sacrifice themselves for their children, and if only they get gratitude for it in the end, that's all they ask.

"Not," he would hasten to add, "that I have any fears about my own boys. They think there's no one in the world like their Daddy. You should see the way they hang on to me. Last week-end, for instance——"

He would maunder on. He was really convinced that he was the best possible father of the best possible children in the world. He was one of those fathers who, failing through their own weakness and ineptitude, are content to partake triumphantly of the achievements of their children. He believed firmly that they had inherited all their good features of body and character from him, and that they owed not only their existence, but also their persistence, on earth entirely to him. He waved aside the fact that, so far from sacrificing himself for them by staying on the diggings, he had not the faintest inclination to do anything that called for greater physical or moral effort. And he chose to ignore the other truth that, so far from supporting them, he was still perpetually in debt for his own support both to his father-in-law and his brother-in-law. . . . He was not now as careful as he once had been about noting down his loans. It was, indeed, hardly any use doing so, since he could never rely on being able to pay them back.

But once when he was borrowing money from Dr. Hugo a brilliant thought had flashed into his mind. For the rest of his life he nursed it warmly.

"Well," he had said to Dr. Hugo on securing the money, "we all have our different ways of being useful to the state. For my part, I have brought three fine sons into the world, and I ought to have the gratitude of the community for it."

Putting his case that way changed the whole character of his loans from Dr. Hugo. Henceforth he looked on them not so much as a favour, but rather as a just reward for his successful paternity.

§ 2

Occasionally, when Dr. Hugo had to visit a patient in that direction, Miriam and Janet would drive with him as far as Baboon's Gully to see how Martin was getting on at the diggings. He would come forward to meet them, a stout, sunburnt man, with a few days' growth of beard on his face, with dungaree trousers loosely belted round his corpulent figure, and a khaki shirt open on his hairy chest. He would be rather pathetically glad to see them, for it was, after all, dull at Baboon's Gully. And he would take them to the little hotel, and bring them out chairs so that they might sit on the verandah, and give them tea or lemonade to drink. He would be very proud to be seen by the other diggers in the company of two such good-looking and well-dressed women—his wife and his sister-in-law, Mrs. Hugo—Dr. Hugo's wife. He would introduce them with what was a vocal if not a bodily flourish. He would put his arm through Dr. Hugo's arm; and stand him drinks, and ask every one in the bar at the time to join them.

Once or twice the boys had come, too—neatly-dressed, open-faced, alert, and these had been supreme days for Martin. They had run along at his side, clutching his hard fingers, asking shrill, excited questions; examining his work with absorbed interest, delighted with every one they met and every one they saw. . . .

Janet would insist on inspecting the small corrugated iron house he shared with another man, and would generally be aghast at the dirt and disorder she found there. The sheets would be soiled, the bed not made, the cups all chipped, the knives dull, odds and ends of decaying food littered around, empty tins strewn everywhere, spiders' webs at the corners of the ceiling. She would scold the Kaffir girl who had charge of her husband's comfort, and her husband for allowing such neglect to persist all around him. But her heart would ache at the desolation of his working days, and she would vow to herself to make his week-ends at home all the happier.

Finally the time would come for them to go; and Martin would linger at the cart, talking against time, until they drove away. Away from Baboon's Gully; from the brown, stony earth dotted with mounds of débris, the lees of many years' digging; from the little hotel of corrugated iron standing solitarily on the empty veld against its background of unvaried blue; and the lonely tents, and the unfulfilled hopes. . . . And as they turned the corner and passed into the gully which gave the place its name, Martin would wave to them with his big coloured handkerchief.

That was always their last sight of him as they left Baboon's Gully. Whenever Miriam thought of the diggings, a picture would come to her mind of that thickset figure waving patiently.

§ 3

And so it had gone on for years. And then, one day extraordinary things had happened. In one sieve Martin had found two good diamonds. He had gone on finding diamonds. It was like a dream. He could not get the ground out fast enough. Every time he washed he found a diamond, or more than one diamond.

He had come across what diggers call a pocket. And before he reached the bottom of it, he had sold over five thousand pounds' worth of diamonds.

His luck rejuvenated him. He no longer felt that, but for this or that, he would have been a success. He *was* a success. Had that accidental pocket been the culmination of twenty years' deliberate search, the accumulation of a lifetime's effort, he could not have been more triumphantly conscious of glorious achievement. If he had been forced to translate his sensations into words he would have had to say that he felt as though he had travailled to make that pocket himself.

The first thing Martin did was to pay off his debts. He owed money to the storekeeper and to the hotel-keeper at Baboon's Gully; to the shop Janet patronised in Adam's Rest; to his father-in-law; and, principally, to his brother-in-law. It was doubtful if any of them had ever expected to see their money again. They had all come to look upon Martin as a naturally unsuccessful and unlucky man, and at the outstandings against his name as bad debts.

But now, at last, he had vindicated himself. Now his whole manner changed. It was the manner of a man who has justified himself.

For the time being, he gave up his digging and stayed with his family at Adam's Rest. He lounged around Adam's Rest telling all the people he met how that pocket had happened to him. "I always said: 'The place to look for diamonds is in the gully.' And they all laughed at me. 'Do you think,' they said, 'no one has ever tried before? What about the water there?' 'But did they try long enough?' I said. 'And did they go on pumping?' "

Here, reconstructing the scene, Martin would look searchingly at his audience.

"Well, the end of it was I made up my mind I would show them who was right in the matter."

He really believed that that was exactly how it had happened. And yet, the simple fact was that the storekeeper had been pressing him for money, and he had, in return, duly pointed out how bad his luck was. "I can go and dig right next to a man who is finding all the time, and I won't see a 'colour.' I can have a good wash—'bantams' and all the rest of it—and what it amounts to is a couple of quarter carats. If I find a decent-sized stone, it's spotted or off-coloured. I always was an unlucky man."

"Why don't you try a different place?" suggested the storekeeper. "What's the use of chasing after the next man's luck all the time?"

"I'd like to know where," grumbled Martin.

"Well, the gully, for instance. Everybody's given it up as a bad job, but my idea is it's never been worked out properly." . . .

The man had spoken quite casually, but his words had knotted themselves into Martin's thoughts. The next time he took out a licence it was for a claim in the gully.

And this was the result of it!

Now the next thing was an adequate celebration. And here Martin surpassed himself. They would all, he and Janet and the three boys, go for a trip to England and the Continent! (The Hugos had been two years before, and ever since Janet had been talking about Miriam's luck.) He would show his old father and mother the sort of man he had made of himself in South Africa, the sort of wife and children he had acquired there. "I swear," he said jovially, "they think I've got a black family."

Both he and Janet lost their heads a little over preparations for the journey. They stayed a month in Cape Town buying themselves and the children clothes. They were to travel first-class, of course, and Janet needed evening things. She had not had an evening dress for years—not, indeed, since the time of her marriage, nine years ago. And then, heaven knows what she did not need besides. In Adam's Rest she wore only garments of her own sewing. But now she wanted tailor-made coats and skirts, model hats, dainty shoes. It was the first time in her life that Janet had ever had the chance of spending lavishly, and she bought whatever attracted her without any consideration of price. Martin encouraged her. "You have that," he would say generously. "Don't worry about the money. There's plenty more where that comes from."

He was as easy with himself. He had not had more than two suits of clothes since he left England. On the diggings he wore duck or dungaree trousers and cotton shirts, and for use in Adam's Rest a suit could last ten years. Now he ordered himself half a dozen suits; shirts, hats, shoes, pyjamas, ties. He took his little sons to his tailor, too. "I want an overcoat for each one. The best you can make." They wriggled in uncontrollable excitement while the tailor's assistant measured them, and the tailor himself noted down their measurements. "Will our coats look just like yours, Daddy?" they demanded shrilly.

The boys were fitted out from top to toe with the best Janet and Martin could find. And on the day before the ship sailed Martin took Janet into a jewellery shop. "I'm going to spend a hundred pounds on you in the next five minutes. Now what do you want?"

If they had been able—the two of them—to consider their lives from a high peak in the regions of Time, they would have seen that this preparatory month in Cape Town was the happiest part, not only of their present adventure, but of the whole adventure of their sojourn on earth.

§ 4

They returned after their year in Europe, not as if they were coming home, but like people visiting a strange land with which they nevertheless had some connection. Henceforth Janet referred to England as "Home." Martin, who had some excuse for it, had never ceased doing so throughout his life in South Africa.

Even the children had come back different. They had lost their sunburn, and, having been left with their grandparents while Martin and Janet travelled about, they had acquired a peculiar kind of accent—an accent which Mr. Lincoln could not place, but which was actually a compound of London and Leeds, for old Mrs. Webster had been born in Leeds.

Yet the children settled back into the old life sooner than their parents. For months Janet could not cease complaining about the dullness of Adam's Rest—"You don't live here," she maintained unceasingly. And as for Martin, he had adopted a pose on his travels which he still maintained. He had set out in the rôle of the man who has made his fortune in South Africa. And not only did he act as if he were the possessor of unlimited wealth, but, receiving the treatment that is accorded a rich man, he had come to the stage of feeling that he really was a rich man. It was a feeling that gave him the most superb aplomb. He was something besides any man's equal. He was any man's colleague, and he was prepared to discuss that man's own subject with him in a spirit of the fullest self-confidence. He was always very emphatic in whatever statement it entered his head to make, and as it was always too ridiculous a statement even to merit opposition, he was left victorious on the field of argument, complacent in the knowledge of his own success.

He was naturally known wherever he went as a bore of the first magnitude, but at least he never lost the respect due to wealth. . . .

Now here he was back in Adam's Rest, and every one knew who he was and how much he had, and he was treated just as Martin Webster always had been treated. He found it difficult to accustom himself to such a state of affairs. "There you are," he said to Janet. "It's quite true. A prophet never has any honour in his own country."

§ 5

About two months after the return to Adam's Rest, Mr. Lincoln said to Martin: "Well, and what are you going to do in the future?"

A little look flitted over Martin's face. It was a quiver of the conscience which, after all, still inhabited his heart. Only a few days ago he had examined his bank-book. He had known that a great deal of money had been spent. But how much exactly he had refused either to calculate or to recognise. Now his bank-book had told him. . . . Nearly a thousand pounds had gone to pay his debts. (That, at least, was something—a clean slate.) Their holiday had cost them—but what had they to show for that?—well over three thousand pounds. The money that was left of his luck in the gully could be counted in hundreds.

He hesitated a moment before answering—what had he not been going to do with his five thousand pounds? And then, a little truculently, he said to his father-in-law: "I'm going back to the life that suits me best. My luck's in now. I'm going back to the diggings."

But he was wrong about his luck. For the rest of his days Martin Webster was a poor and struggling man.

CHAPTER III

§ 1

MIRIAM found it hard to realise that ten years had passed away since the Boer War. Ten years had gone that would never return, and they had taken with them her youth and buried it in the land of the Past. And what had they left instead? For what was it she had waited all her life, and was still waiting?

She sat in front of her house and looked at the river flowing agelessly past. And it seemed to her, as she sat there so quietly, her hands in her lap, that she was alone in a great, dim hall. At the end of the hall there was a screen, and across the screen there ran endlessly the story of her life. It was a story that told, not only of things that had happened, but also of things that might have happened, and even of things that never could have happened. It was a story of which she could not understand the meaning, a tale of nothings that swelled into something; of somethings that dwindled into nothing. It was a story without beginning and without end. The story of an Immortal. Of a Being persistent on earth and inevitable. Who had thrown days away lavishly as if they were inexhaustible. Who had made provision for a never-to-be-ended existence. Who was for ever anticipating, interminably expectant. Who had heard of Death, seen and known it, and yet could not feel there was such a thing—for herself. . . .

It was an insignificant tale, planned by an anonymous author. But no one knew—or did the author?—how the plot would work out.

She sat motionlessly, her hands restrained, left on right, and watched.

§ 2

Miriam was thirty-five and she was afraid. She was afraid because she was thirty-five, and soon she would not even be thirty-five any more. Soon this body of hers which was the only body she had or ever could have, which was her very self, would no longer be as good a body as it once had been. However one bolstered the matter up, old age was degeneracy. The old were not as strong, as beautiful, as clever, as quick, as ardent as the young. They had experience—yes. But what was the good of experience that might not be put to the test? A futility, a bitterness. Oh, who should not weep to grow old?

Often Miriam wondered how she would feel if, on looking into her mirror, she should see there, instead of the face she knew, the face that was destined to be hers in old age. What a horror that would be! And yet one day she would unquestioningly accept that damaged face as her own.

And sometimes she told herself: "I am not looking well to-day. I am tired—out of sorts—to-morrow I shall look better."

And to-morrow—the next week, the next year even—she did look better. But still, steadily, all the time, she was getting to look worse.

Miriam was at that period of life when women tell themselves that no one would take them to be thirty-five (hardly, indeed, thirty), but yet know that the twenties are far away; when they try to gain a year or two from the world by withholding their age; when they dress to seem younger (yet dare not dress too youthfully); when they study the lines on their faces, and look at other women's faces to see whether they too have that suggestion of fleshiness under their chins, that blurring of the firm outlines of youth; when the compliment they chiefly appreciate is a compliment that strips the years from them; when they take comfort from the fact that the interesting age for women is continually being pushed forward. . . . She was, in short, at that period of life when, so abhorrent is the thought of decay, that nothing matters except to be young.

And yet it was not exactly that she felt thirty-five itself to be such a terrible age. She knew that she had gained something with the years. She despised the uncertainties and affectations of youth. Yes. She could bear to be thirty-five. But she could not bear to be more than thirty-five. She dimly realised that there had been a time when she could bear to be twenty-five and not twenty-six, when she could bear to be thirty and not thirty-one. The age at which she found herself was, for the moment, bearable. It was the age at which she had not yet arrived that she hated to contemplate.

Now she wanted to use her waning youth. She expressed her want in the ways that lay open to her. Suddenly she began going to dances again, took up tennis vigorously, learnt to ride astride, went to Johannesburg and bought herself pretty clothes, came back to Adam's Rest exhausted with the deliberate amusement she had hunted in Johannesburg. She made friends with the younger women of Adam's Rest, and even with the younger men.

She compared herself as honestly as she could with the young women in her circle—wondered whether really those ten or twelve years which they had not yet lived made such a comparison a dangerous thing for her. She positively could not see that she looked much older than they did. Nor, indeed, did she. Her animation, her slenderness, her clean-featured fairness, kept the years at bay. It was difficult, for instance, to think that she was Janet's senior by nearly two years. Since ever Janet had put up her hair she had looked the elder sister. To-day she might have been quite easily five years older than Miriam.

She was a big woman—like her Aunt Laura, whom she strongly resembled, what men termed "a fine figure of a woman." Her height and weight combined to produce an impression of a settled maturity, and, although she liked good clothes, she was not as careful about her person as Miriam. Nevertheless, she frankly considered herself a handsome woman, and, despite her financial restrictions, she entered into whatever gaiety Adam's Rest offered with a hearty urgency which was very different from Miriam's questing eagerness.

"What does it matter," she said to Miriam, "if I *am* older than those girls? I'm better-looking, and I'm not as silly, and I get just as much fun out of life."

"Yes," returned Miriam. "But when they are your age, you'll be a middle-aged woman."

"Then I'll know that I've had my time."

"No, you won't," said Miriam. "That is where you are wrong. You have to be very old and tired before you are prepared to admit that you have had your time. What happens is something much worse. What happens is that while you still want to have your time other people come along and remind you that you've already had it. It's like you can't eat your cake and have it. You can't live your time and keep it." . . .

"And then," she added, "what if you don't even live your time?"

It was this anxiety to live her time that was obsessing Miriam now. She could not afford to dream any more. Could not now afford, as in childhood, to indulge her habit of anticipation. Always Janet had been satisfied with the present—she never. Now she had to take the present or nothing.

She often balanced the credit and debit sides of her life. It was as if she had written on one side of her slate: "So many years spent." And on the other side: "In hand such and such things for which I have paid those years."

So: She was thirty-five. And, against that, she had health, a mind, some good looks. She had comfort, even a mild luxury. She had her husband and child. Her husband was the most loved and respected man in the whole district. People came to him not only with their sicknesses but with their sorrows. The little Kaffir children trailed after him with their round bellies and their sore eyes, and loved him. All the Kaffirs for miles around—even the old, old ones—whose junior he was by thirty years—called him father. It was, in Adam's

Rest, a distinguished thing for Miriam to be his wife. It made her the first lady there. Even the magistrate and his wife had not the position they held. Well, that was something. . . . And then, her child. It was true Isabel was not a brilliant or fascinating child. But at least she was a good child, a healthy child—a mother, not too exacting, could be satisfied with her. . . .

All her circumstances were propitious. She had no secret anxieties. What more did she want?

And she answered the question herself. She wanted to know that she lived, to be stirred, to feel. She loved her husband and child, but they did not stir her, they did not make her feel. They were like a part of her body. Like her hands or her eyes. They belonged to her. She would suffer if they were hurt. Without them life would be insupportable. But there they were all the time, and she could no longer realise them. . . .

She told herself that she wanted something else, something outside. She tried to gather interests around her, even while she scoffed at their futility; to fill the passing days; to taste the hurrying moments.

But the slate would not balance. "So many years spent. . . ." How the debit side overtopped the credit side! It seemed to her as if she were balancing pounds against shillings and pence.

§ 3

One day she met Carrie Lowe in The Street. Carrie was now forty, and living most decently with her mother, old Mrs. Croft. Her two elder children, both girls, were married to diggers in Baboon's Gully. Her son—Lowe's son—was still going to school, and the little girl, the fruit of her love-adventure, was now ten years old. Carrie had come back to Adam's Rest seven years ago, thinner, browner, quieter than she once had been, but with the courage to meet her world still in her. She knew that she had abandoned the old position for which she had fought in Adam's Rest, that she had lost the weapon of her unsullied respectability; but she was still prepared to battle for a foothold. She took in sewing, kept herself white, and scorned to associate with Henry who, during her absence, had helped to maintain her family. At least one thing could not be said against her. It could not be said of her, as of Henry, that she had betrayed the dominant race in her. Her child, whom she called Maudie Lowe, was as white as a grandchild of Mrs. Croft's could conceivably be. She was whiter than any of the real Lowe children who, as they grew older, had lost a good deal of their original fairness. Maudie Lowe had soft, straight, reddish hair; her mother's yellow eyes, black-lashed; a pale, freckled skin; and thin, red lips. No stranger would have doubted her absolute whiteness; and, at the age of ten, she already had a kind of malignant attraction. It was not, like Frances Maxwell's, an attraction which owed its origin to an arresting loveliness, and yet it had to do with her looks too; and yet, again, it was something of the same sort of attraction.

She was walking with her mother when Miriam stopped to ask Carrie about some sewing she was doing for her. Carrie answered in her usual tone of respectful, but subtly ironical, politeness. Never, in all her life, had Miriam felt comfortable in Carrie's presence, and she did not now. There was something—or she thought there was something—in Carrie which troubled her. Behind the shadowed skin, the controlled voice, she felt a terrible eagerness to "live." She smiled to think that she and Carrie were both driven by the same urgency.

Carrie looked up now with her yellow eyes. Maudie duplicated that yellow regard. "I see," said Carrie, "you've got a grand new motor-car."

It was not merely a statement; it was a compliment, and also an accusation.

Miriam found herself answering apologetically. "My husband needed it very badly for those long distances he has to travel to see his patients." And she wondered, as she spoke, why she should feel herself called upon to explain anything to Carrie.

"But you will use it, too," commented Carrie. "Yourself."

"Oh, yes!" said Miriam.

There was a little pause, and then Carrie said in her soft voice: "I hear you're having a very gay time nowadays."

The words were simple, the tone politely envious; and yet Miriam found herself hating Carrie Lowe.

It was as if Carrie had sneered at her—at her forcibly-held, restless, escaping youth.

It was as if Carrie had said: "That's all I wanted, too. A gay time."

CHAPTER IV

§ 1

LATELY Miriam had had the old farm-house at her husband's farm put into order, had hung up fresh curtains, stained and polished the white deal floors, and repaired the old furniture. She had trimmed the disorderly garden, and filled it with new plants. She had had a tennis court made—the surface hardened with blue-ground and ant-heap. Now they spent the weekends at the farm. They had a telephone there and the motor-car, and an urgent call found Dr. Hugo accessible.

On Saturday afternoons and Sundays the house was full of young people come over from Adam's Rest. Janet and Martin and the boys came whenever they could get room in some one else's conveyance, generally in Dr. Hugo's car. Often one of the numerous neighbouring Hugos rode across from his own place. The magistrate and his wife and daughter were regular visitors. One or two school-teachers came; a young attorney; an occasional civil servant; the manager of the bank and his new clerk, a man called Emery Maytham, in whom all the young girls in Adam's Rest were interested on account of the romantic figure he cut, with his bad lungs and his wistful good looks. That was why—because his lungs were affected—he had come from England to South Africa, eventually to drift down to Adam's Rest. It was told of him that he had been to an English public school. Only about half a dozen people in Adam's Rest gave this fact due recognition. To Adam's Rest, as a whole, it made no difference whether a man had gone to a public school or a board school. They probably regarded it as the same thing.

Emery Maytham was tall and thin and fair, and he stooped slightly. He had a broad forehead; hurt-looking, dark-blue eyes; a sensitive mouth. He had long, slender hands. He generally came out to the farm carrying an easel and a book of poetry. Sometimes he played a little tennis, but he greatly preferred it if he were asked to read. The magistrate and his wife and Janet and Martin had no patience with poetry; Dr. Hugo was only intermittently interested; and Miriam was, as a rule, too occupied with her duties as hostess to be able to give him much time. But the girls who came there liked to sit with him while he read, even if they found his poetry rather unnecessary. And then there was always Felix.

It was strange how this twelve-year old boy responded to the spirit of beauty, how words moved him. It was really Felix who charged the atmosphere with that subtle current that thrills a performer into vitality. Whoever else might be there, it was to Felix that Emery read. They sat on a rug under the shady pepper tree, the man reading in his slow, deep voice, the boy very still, his eyes ardent.

When Miriam was able to join them, she too sat on the rug, and then Felix lay with his head on her lap while she put her fingers through his thick, golden-brown hair. They had a great affinity, these two. Miriam always felt that he ought to have been hers. And once it had happened that Felix had taken the caressing hand in his brown boy's hand, and lightly passed it across his lips. It might have been a kiss, she did not know. But it stirred her to her depths. She looked down, and found his dark eyes resting on her, and a little smile on his mouth. At that moment she felt as if, for some undefined reason, she wanted to sacrifice herself for this boy.

Ten minutes later he was jumping about and shouting on the tennis court, and she was wondering at the feeling which, a little while before, had possessed both of them.

§ 2

When it came to the question of Emery's paintings, matters were a little more difficult. He used to exhibit his canvases to Miriam with a wistful eagerness that, looking at his pale, thin face, she could not bear to disappoint. But she was essentially honest, and she could not find it in her to praise lavishly things which really did not please her. Still, she would look at his work attentively, and give it her serious consideration. "You mustn't ask me to judge, Mr. Maytham," she said to him once. "I don't know anything at all about art."

"But you know what you like, don't you?"

"Oh, yes, I know what I like."

"Do you like any of these?"

She tried to evade the question. "Isn't that our well, that picture there?"

"Yes."

"And that figure beside the well?"

"That's your herd-boy, Adonis."

"I see," said Miriam, to whose mind the figure bore no resemblance to Adonis or any other living being.

His blue eyes were on her face.

"I know you think it doesn't look like Adonis."

She did not answer.

"You don't, do you?" he insisted.

"Well, no," she admitted. "I don't."

"But that doesn't matter. It's not supposed to be a portrait. It's a picture. It doesn't need to be accurate. If you want accuracy, you use a camera."

He could not paint, and he slurred over his ineptitudes with conventional phrases. And yet that was not all. He had the emotions and aspirations of an artist. Art was to him the supreme thing. He would have given ten years of his wavering, tuberculous life to write a great poem, to paint a noble picture. Only he could not. The exchange would never be demanded of him. But, since all his heart was in it, he persisted in trying; and there were even times when he persuaded himself that an attempt had succeeded.

He continued with his anxious exposition,—

"I don't paint only the object I see, I paint what I see *into* that object. A thing moves me in a certain way, and what I try to reproduce is my emotion, not the actual thing itself. You understand that, don't you?"

Miriam looked from him to his canvas, a little bewildered. She had not heard that kind of talk in Adam's Rest before. Try as she would, she could find no suggestion of the emotion which had inspired that crude painting of the well, with the smudge, vaguely insinuating a human form, beside it.

"I think I understand what you mean," she said. "But what if people, looking at your picture, don't see what it was you felt when you painted it?"

"Then," he admitted, "there is something wrong either with the people or with my picture. Most likely," he smiled a little sadly, "with my picture."

He turned over a few more canvases, and held one up.

"This," he said, "is one of the best things I have ever done."

It was a picture of trees bending grotesquely.

"Now, doesn't that satisfy you?" he asked. "Don't you feel the wind in the trees? Look how the whole thing—how it balances. Even if I turn it sideways or upside down, it's right. Can't you see that?"

Miriam could see nothing but some odd-looking trees. Yet they were undoubtedly trees, and, anxious to say a few pleasant words, she found something to praise in them.

"You really like the picture?" he said. "You really do? I thought you would. And still——"

He looked at his work lovingly. "I'm glad you like it. Because I honestly feel it's good." His thin face reddened. "I had the idea, while I was painting it, that I would like you to have it. Will you?"

He held the canvas towards her as he spoke.

Miriam took it. It touched her that he was offering her the best he had.

"Thank you," she said impulsively. "I shall love it."

But when Miriam showed the picture to her husband, his friendly brown eyes twinkled.

"Well," she invited, "say your worst."

"Not at all," he said. "I'm just thinking it reminds me of that poem the poor chap read to us last Sunday. Keats's 'Ode to a Grecian Urn.' " . . . Miriam looked puzzled. "Don't you remember? 'Ah, happy, happy boughs! that cannot shed your leaves.' . . . No physical force will ever make those leaves drop off."

Miriam smiled her response, but she answered with a sympathetic note in her voice. "Poor man! Art means so much to him. And he has nothing besides. It's rather pathetic, I think."

She hung the picture in her rondavel sitting-room. At first, whenever she went into the room, she saw nothing there except those misshapen trees, they drew her eyes. But after a week or two she did not dislike them so much; and, in time, she got used to them, and did not see them at all.

But, as for Emery, the sight of his picture hanging on Miriam's wall gave him an extraordinary amount of satisfaction. To begin with, it had worried him that he was receiving from Dr. Hugo and his wife so much unrepaid hospitality; and he regarded the picture as some return, as a tribute to their kindness. And then it made him happy to visit them and to see it there beautifying the room. He loved the thing. His eyes were always turning towards it with an appreciative look.

He spoke of it with a simple candour surprising in a man over thirty. "You still like it, Mrs. Hugo, don't you?"

"Yes, of course."

Her heartiness encouraged him. "I'm doing quite a lot of still life now," he confided to her. "I wish you and the doctor would come to my room at the hotel and let me show you my books and pictures. I don't mean only my own work—other people's things, too. I'm always buying them. At least, I did in England. That's why I haven't got any money."

He was a frank soul.

"Sometimes," he continued, "I reproach myself for my extravagance. I tell myself that a man who isn't too healthy—though, mind you, I'm getting stronger here daily—that a man like me ought to be careful about his money. But then, in a way, again, it's a kind of investment, isn't it? The money's still there. Only in a different form. You see, I have always bought judiciously. Of course, I couldn't afford the established artists. But it's really a sound business proposition to buy the work of coming men. And, looking at it in another way, the interest I get is the pleasure I find in possessing beautiful things. Don't you agree with me, Mrs. Hugo?"

He was asking her to help him to appease his conscience. He was of those who cannot resist temptation, and at the same time torture themselves with the knowledge of their weakness—who therefore the more insistently demand satisfaction for having yielded.

Miriam evaded his plea for moral support.

"Some things," she said, "never lose their value."

He was anxious for reassurance, and so found it in her tempered words.

"That is exactly what I feel myself," he said eagerly. "Good things don't lose their value. If I needed money at a pinch, I could always realise it on my stuff. . . .

Well, then, Mrs. Hugo, will you bring your husband along?"

She readily agreed to do so; and the next evening he led them up the stairs of the Empire Hotel to his room.

Miriam had wondered what kind of a room such an æsthetic soul would inhabit. Now she knew. It was as uncomfortable and ugly a room as she had ever seen in Adam's Rest. As Emery had truthfully told her, he never had any money, and so he had to content himself with the worst room in the hotel. But he invited them in with a kind of shy dignity.

It was a fairly long room, but very low and narrow. Its solitary window looked out on to the hotel stable, and, directly opposite, the door led out on to the hotel passage. Except for a small table beside his bed, all the furniture was ranged on the two long sides of the room. On one side stood his bed, a bookcase, and a wash-stand with a chipped jug and basin on it. On the other side, a dressing-table of pine stained yellow, with the yellow peeling off; a very tall, roughly-made bookcase; and, near the window, facing the bed, his easel. Some of his clothes hung from hooks on the door; his boots stood in an untidy row under the wash-stand; and he probably accommodated his soiled linen in the small iron trunk under his bed, for a used shirt was escaping from its partly-raised lid.

The room was papered in a faded green paper with a design of dull pink fleurs-de-lys on it; but very little of the paper was to be seen, since the walls were covered with pictures. On the dressing-table, in honour of their visit, stood his shaving-mug filled with drooping veld-flowers. And on the little table beside his bed there was a tray holding wine and biscuits. The room was lit by a paraffin lamp against the wall, and two candles.

He drew forward two bentwood chairs that were standing near the door, and asked them to sit down while he displayed his treasures to them. None of his own pictures were on the walls, but he glowed as he described the merits of those which he had acquired by purchase.

"Of course," he pointed out now and then, "this room doesn't give them a chance. For instance, when the paint is laid on like this, you can't really see the thing if you're standing right on top of it. And then, the wall-paper, and the bad light, and the way everything is crowded up. But perhaps you can feel what they would look like in the proper surroundings."

He regarded his visitors with anxious eyes.

Conrad and Miriam murmured politenesses, which he accepted, as was his way, quite literally.

Dr. Hugo rose from his chair, and went to examine Emery's books. He himself was what one might term a sound reader. He read with enjoyment along conventional lines; and, for preference, good, solid stuff. He knew a certain amount about books that were from twenty to two thousand years old; but not too much about books that were only from a year to twenty years old. . . . Now here on Emery's shelves there were books he had never before heard of. Recent books by men unknown to him—modern poetry, modern novels, and such books as he imagined must belong to the category called belles-lettres. . . . Many men Dr. Hugo knew bought the classics in sets, but the current books they borrowed from libraries. And this consumptive bank clerk had the courage to buy the works of new writers!

Dr. Hugo looked at his tall, stooping figure with a kind of respect. Quite possibly he had no deep foundation for his culture, but, at least, he was prepared to rely on his own taste; he bought the books he wanted, the books that interested him, and thus created his own taste. His preferences might be for ephemeral things, but they were personal preferences, and not merely a blind, traditional acceptance. He took and was not given.

It always delighted Dr. Hugo to be able to praise.

"Your books are not anybody's books, Maytham—if I may say so. They do express yourself."

"For whatever that self is worth," Emery deprecated. But where he had hitherto humbly accepted the polite formula of his friends' appreciation, he caught now an admiration in Dr. Hugo's voice that sent the blood to his pale face, and made his wistful eyes shine.

He drew his books out one by one, and spoke about them lovingly. They all held their special appeal for him, because he had craved them before acquiring them. . . . even those that had come into the world still-born, and those that had died soon after birth, and those that had been trodden down, buried, and forgotten except by such as he. He put them back on their shelves, a few words in memory of each. . . . He took out other books. Here were the old, old books of a generation ago; and here were books that, after a thousand years, were still young; and here were books, his contemporaries, but destined to outlive the hands that held them.

"I couldn't live," he said, as he fingered them, "without my books."

"Yes. They are a part of you," agreed Dr. Hugo. "I see that."

Emery looked at him with gratitude. There was a sympathy in Dr. Hugo which he had not met before. Now he understood why the old Kaffirs and the little baby Kaffirs came to this thin, neutral-tinted man with the understanding brown eyes, and called him "father." Conrad Hugo loved humanity.

"I'll be happy," Emery said, "if you'll allow me to lend you any of these books you might care to read."

He urged some of his favourites on Conrad and Miriam, put them on his dressing-table ready for them to take away.

"And now," he said, "may I give you a glass of wine and a biscuit?"

Conrad and Miriam sat down again on the rickety bentwood chairs, and Emery sat on the edge of his bed. After they had talked for a few minutes, Miriam remembered that he had as yet shown them none of his own work. He was evidently waiting for an invitation from them to do so.

"What about your own pictures, Mr. Maytham?" she asked.

"Would you like to see them?"

"Of course."

He opened a drawer in his dressing-table. There, among a litter of clean collars and socks and ties and handkerchiefs, were some rolled up canvases. "Excuse me a moment," he said to Dr. Hugo, and pulled out the iron trunk from underneath his bed. He groped about naïvely among soiled underwear of every description, and produced some more canvases. He looked up, red from stooping, to find Miriam and Dr. Hugo smiling, and smiled back. "I haven't anywhere else to keep them," he explained unnecessarily.

It was the old painful stuff.

For something to say, Miriam asked him why he had never painted any of the people in Adam's Rest.

"The Kaffirs," suggested Dr. Hugo.

"Or Frances Maxwell, for instance," added Miriam. "If I could paint, I would paint her. I find her a very interesting type. Don't you?"

"I can't say I do," said Emery.

"With those wonderful eyes!"

"I haven't noticed them," said Emery. "I don't think I have ever spoken to her."

"And you're an artist!" exclaimed Miriam.

She had applied the term to him in a deliberate effort to make him happy.

He glowed with pleasure; and, before they went, he had pressed upon them, not only his books, but also the gift of another picture—their own old farmhouse against a flushed sunset.

They were bound to take it.

On their way home, Dr. Hugo turned to his wife with a laugh. "My dear," he said, "at this rate, we'll soon have, as the catalogues say, a unique collection of Maythams."

"I'm glad you're amused," said Miriam. "But I honestly don't know where to hang this one. And we must hang it, or he'll be too terribly disillusioned."

§ 3

There grew up a friendship between the Hugos and Emery Maytham that made for the greater happiness of all of them. Dr. Hugo liked the man and found him interesting; and the more likable and interesting on account of his peculiar simplicity, which was not so much a simplicity of intellect as of heart. Miriam found that, not only was he in himself interesting, but he made so much else seem interesting, too—not least of all, herself.

She had lately been devoting a good deal of thought to her own complexities. Was she still the woman she had been, had she anything of the lure of youth left, did her womanhood still count? And although all her problems circled round the mortality of the flesh, it was, in its essence, a spiritual rather than a physical phase through which Miriam was passing. It was to the spirit of youth she was clinging—the hopes, the charm, the gaiety, the insouciance—even if that spirit expressed itself in bodily terms. Often she said to her husband: "Conrad, do you realise that I'm getting old?" And he brushed her wistfulness aside with a genial flourish: "My dear little girl, you don't look a day older than when I first married you."

"But I do, Conrad; I must. So many years have passed. I'm thirty-six now, don't forget. How can you deny I've changed?"

"Well, I can't see it. To me you always look just the same."

There it was. To him she always looked just the same. This man whose sympathies ran out to every one, this man who knew her so well—he could not understand what was agitating her. To him she always looked just the same. In other words, he no longer saw her at all, she made no fresh impression on his mind. It was like Maytham's picture in her sitting-room. At first it had jumped out at her every time she came into the room. She could see nothing in the room except those trees, doing strange gymnastics. Afterwards they had not seemed so predominant to her. She only realised them occasionally. Then she saw them with a conscious effort. And now they might have been rubbed off the canvas altogether for the effect they had on her eye and thought.

It was the same with a too familiar face. She knew every line and bone of her husband's face, every pore, it sometimes seemed to her, in Isabel's face; and yet she did not see them as faces at all. And their voices. And their feelings. She knew them so well that she did not know them any more.

She wondered if, in his secret heart, Conrad was as introspective as she was. Perhaps, without ever giving her a hint of it, he, too, was torturing himself with the thought that no longer did any one dear to him see him as an individual, that he was losing his entity, that he had become merely a symbol and a tradition. Or were men different? She could not tell. She could not find out from Conrad. Even when he loved her most, there were depths in him which were beyond her reach.

She had begun to feel that she was living in a kind of spiritual desolation, when suddenly she realised that there was a man who *saw* her. It was a tuberculous failure of a man, but yet a man—not unattractive—who could feel and understand.

They had been sitting one day beside the river, she on the low, bent branch of a tree, he on a big stone beside her. He had been reading to her. And she had fallen into her old pose of looking into the distance as at life passing across a screen. Her hands crossed one another, restrained, left over right; her whole attitude was a deep watching.

"I wish to Heaven," Emery had said abruptly, "I could paint you as you are now. Please don't move."

But, of course, she had moved. "Why?" she had asked.

He had hesitated. "I don't know if I can explain. Yes, I can. You looked—perhaps it's an odd thing to say—you looked fateful."

§ 4

After that she was conscious of his eyes on her. She knew he saw her. It made a great difference. She felt happier with him, but not so easy; and she liked this little uneasiness. She began to notice, not only what he said to her, but also, and more significantly, what she said to him. Very often she found herself considering what kind of an impression a thing she had worn, a phrase she had used, had made on him. Sometimes he told her. He might say, in his diffidently enthusiastic way: "You don't know how that jade-green dress suits you, Mrs. Hugo. Do you mind my saying so?"

Of course she did not mind his saying so. She delighted in his saying so. It was quite a different kind of appreciation from any one else's. It was—although he was a failure as an artist—an artistic appreciation; and, moreover, it was a man's tribute to an effect which she had created on him as a woman. When Aunt Laura or Janet or any woman friend admired a garment of hers, it was from a peculiarly feminine standpoint—from a comparative and competitive and *professional* standpoint. They would praise the cut, consider the material, ask her where she had bought the dress and whether that style was now in the fashion. They were looking, not at Miriam in the dress, but at the dress on Miriam. Yes, there she had it: the distinction between the man's and the woman's standard of criticism.

As for Conrad, he liked her to have good shoes and stockings; but, apart from this one partiality he found her equally attractive in anything she wore. He certainly never regarded her pictorially. It was as she had already decided—he did not consciously see her.

And now here was Emery Maytham. He noticed what she said, and how she looked. It interested him if she rearranged her furniture, or made a new cushion, or cooked a new dish. He listened with an anxious deference to her opinions, remembered her prejudices and predilections, most flatteringly respected her advice. He really charged her existence with a new vitality. He made her feel that she mattered tremendously.

He came as an answer to her questioning.

CHAPTER V

§ 1

The year 1912 ran into the year 1913, and nothing was very different in Adam's Rest, except that life was expanding in the young, and shrinking in the old. All the three Webster boys, Felix and Claude and Stanley, were at school and were doing well there—they were each first in their respective classes. Isabel was going to school, too, and she was fulfilling her mother's prophecy of the good conduct prize. The only thing, besides behaviour, for which she showed any aptitude was sewing. For the rest, she was, as ever, healthy, with an excellent appetite; and there she ended. The unfortunate child had no head. There was nothing wrong with her except plain, annoying stupidity. She could not understand, and she could not learn.

When she was six, Miriam had tried to teach her to count up to ten. She could never remember the order of the figures. "One, two, three——" she would say quickly. She would hesitate. "Seven?" she would add inquiringly. "No, four," Miriam would say with conscious patience. "Oh, yes, four," Isabel would acquiesce, and would stop again.

"And what comes after four?"

Isabel would look at her mother blankly.

"F——" Miriam would prompt.

"F——" Isabel would repeat obediently.

"You knew yesterday," Miriam would coax. "Try again. One, two, three, four, f——"

"One, two, three, four, f——"

"F—— five!" Miriam would say explosively.

"Five," Isabel would agree amiably.

"Now begin again."

"One, two, three——" Isabel was always confident about the first three figures. "One, two, three—five!" she would declare triumphantly.

The end of the lesson always found Miriam in despair, humiliated to think that her only child should be so ineffectual. She would tell herself angrily that the more trouble a thing cost, the less it was worth trouble. It was the same with a worn-out sock or a stupid child. The sock that took an hour to darn was less worth darning than the sock that took five minutes to darn. It would be in holes again after one more wearing. It was, economically, not worth darning at all. And the child that took an hour to learn what another child could learn in five minutes was not worth teaching.

But the mood would pass, and Miriam would try again. Even after Isabel had passed out of her hands, and into the school, she would sit and struggle with her.

Now Isabel was in the same class as Stanley, the youngest Webster boy; but whereas he was always at the top, although nearly a year younger than she was, she remained steadily and complacently at the bottom.

Another representative of the third generation at Adam's Rest was at the school. This was Carrie Lowe's love-child, Maudie, now about eleven years old. She was in Claude's class, a sly, strange child, with her reddish hair and freckles, and her yellow, black-lashed eyes.

Whenever Miriam saw her she experienced a secret repulsion. It was something of the same kind of discomfort she suffered in Carrie's presence, only intensified; and it was a feeling distinctly at variance with the feeling she had for Maudie's cousin, Frances. Miriam had always liked Frances, her velvety-black eyes with the shadows beneath, her drawling voice. Whenever Miriam met her, she stopped to speak to her for the pleasure she found in looking at her, and the fascination of her sing-song utterance.

It was a partiality which amused them all, and chiefly her husband and Emery. Dr. Hugo always spoke of the girl as "Miriam's Frances," but they both denied that she had any particular beauty.

And, as a matter of fact, Frances was not as lovely now as she had been when a child. It was, as Miriam had seen before, a fatality that almost invariably overtook the children of colour. The black blood in them seemed to grow stronger as they grew older—it darkened their skins and coarsened their features. Frances no longer looked as if she might be a beautiful Spaniard or Italian. She was obviously a Eurafrican.

She may have been aware of the slight deterioration herself, for lately she had taken to correcting her clear brownness by the use of a great deal of powder and a little rouge. . . . How history was repeating itself! Miriam remembered, as if it were happening before her eyes now, how, more than twenty years ago, she had caught Frances's mother, Susie, rubbing the red of a geranium flower on her cheeks and lips. Now Susie was resigned to her brown middle-age. But here was Frances, her daughter, doing the same thing; only sufficiently advanced in civilisation to use the red from a chemist-shop rather than the red from a flower. . . . And twenty years hence it would all happen again; and a daughter of Frances's would redden her cheeks and lips; and the further difference would be that, allowing once more for the onward march of culture, this girl would apply the colouring rather more skilfully than poor Frances had succeeded in doing.

§ 2

Frances was still in the telephone office, but she now had her hair up, was attending dances, and was receiving a great deal of quite honourable attention from some of the young men in Adam's Rest. It was Felix who generally brought home the latest gossip about Frances's love-affairs. Felix was every one's friend, no distinctions, whether of age, colour, sex, or circumstance, existed for him. He was, at the age of thirteen, as attractive a boy as ever; a little wild, a little moody, rather untidy, but very quick and handsome, and with his old charm of vivid interestedness. There was not a soul in Adam's Rest who did not love him and welcome him.

After school-hours he found life very full. He sat on the shop-counters, his brown, bare legs dangling backwards and forwards, and talked to the shop-assistants. If there was a rush of business, he nimbly helped behind the counter. He knew the handicaps of the men who played billiards at the Empire Hotel, discussed their bad luck with them, and watched their progress with great interest. He helped his grandfather arrange the bottles in his little apothecary; went on his rounds with Dr. Hugo; stood by while old Mrs. Croft made her preserves; and discussed Frances's young men with Frances herself. It caused him no effort to be first at school, and it had lately come into Miriam's mind that one day the boy ought to be sent to college. She secretly decided that, unless the miraculous thing happened and Martin was once more successful at digging, she herself would undertake to assist Felix to study for some profession. At present she felt it was a little early to discuss the matter.

"Well," Felix was telling them, "there are three chaps after Frances. There's a farmer called van der Westhuizen, and a man from Baboon's Gully who's just found a diamond, and the barman of the Empire. But Frances says she won't have any of them. They aren't refined enough for her, she says."

"What does she want?" laughed Emery.

"Oh, an artist, I suppose, like you," the boy flashed back with cheerful impudence. "All the girls are keen on you, so why shouldn't poor Frances . . . ?"

Emery laughed again. But Miriam found her face setting hard. Felix's remark annoyed her exceedingly. She felt all at once that she did not want the girls in Adam's Rest to be interested in Emery; that no one had the right to be interested in him except herself. She realised to her horror that she was jealous on Emery's account.

§ 3

She could not, after this realisation, treat Emery as she had treated him before. She could not treat him naturally. She was either too pleasant or too unpleasant. Her attitude puzzled and worried him. After having been free of their house for nearly a year, he felt now a discomfort in approaching it.

It was a feeling that reached a climax after she had met him walking down the street one day with Frances. The following Sunday, on the farm, sitting on the bench under the pepper tree, she said to him suddenly: "I didn't know you were friendly with Frances Maxwell."

"I'm not—particularly. I've hardly spoken to her more than once or twice."

There was a silence. Miriam wanted to say something—to say something ironical and damaging. She restrained herself. This was madness.

"Do you think I ought not to go about with her?" Emery asked in his candid way.

"How can I tell you what you ought or ought not to do?" Miriam said stiffly. "Surely you can decide for yourself."

"Well, you see, I'm English. I haven't been in South Africa much more than a year, and I can't quite appreciate the attitude of people here towards the colour question. You attach tremendous importance to it, don't you?"

"And do you think we are wrong?"

"Oh, no, I wouldn't dare to say that. I don't know enough about it to be able to give an opinion. Still, there has been a great deal of intermarriage in South Africa, hasn't there? You positively have, not only a coloured population, but a coloured race here."

"Do you consider that creditable to us—something to be encouraged?" There was a rising indignation in Miriam's voice. "Why, it's only in the Cape that intermarriage is legal. In the Transvaal and Free State it isn't allowed at all."

He answered in terms which Janet had put to her twenty years ago.

"And yet, what difference does a drop of black actually make? The Crofts here, for instance, don't seem to me any worse than white people of their class. In fact, I honestly think they are better than your poor whites."

"Can't you see that it's a degenerate taint?" Miriam protested. "Like lunacy or crime——"

"Or consumption," Emery interposed gently. "My father died of consumption. And although some people say it isn't hereditary, here I am with it too. So that puts me outside the pale as well, and I ought to sympathise with other poor folk who are outside the pale."

Miriam shook her head. "If you argue like that, I can't say anything at all."

He smiled at her. "Well, then, I withdraw that remark. Only tell me now, aren't you sorry for a poor girl like Frances? You've often told me how much you like her. I've seen you speaking to her myself. You even wanted me to paint her. And yet now I can see you think it's wrong for me to walk down the street with her."

Miriam could not explain. How could she make him understand the subtle social distinctions between black and white? How could she tell him that, while it was permissible to stop and talk to a coloured person, it was forbidden to walk with her? That, however amiably disposed a white person might be towards a black, a handshake between them was out of the question? Miriam remembered how once, as a small girl going back to boarding-school after a holiday, she had innocently offered to shake hands with their old Kaffir boy in saying good-bye to him. The man had worked for them for six years and they all had an affection for him.

But he had looked at her—at her gesture—not only in astonishment but with affright. He had not taken her hand. Afterwards her Aunt Laura had told her that she must never, under any circumstances, shake hands with a Kaffir. And, in future, when she left home or returned home, there would be a pleasant interchange of greetings between her and old Stoffel, but she did not again hold out her hand to him.

And, indeed, Miriam could not remember ever having seen any white person, except a missionary, shake hands with a Kaffir. One might give a Kaffir food and charity, but not a handshake.

As a child, Miriam had once discussed the status of Kaffirs with her father. She had felt herself to be triumphantly logical.

"Human beings come first in creation, don't they, father?" she had asked.

"We humans think so," he had agreed cautiously, for he never knew where argument with Miriam might not lead him.

"And a Kaffir is a human being, isn't he?"

"We don't all agree to that; but still, pass it."

"And a dog or a monkey or a sheep comes lower in the scale?"

"On the whole, we must concede that. Yes."

"Well, then, father, how is it I can play with a puppy or a lamb or a little monkey and not with a Kaffir child? My dog can run around the house and jump on my bed even, but we wouldn't let Stoffel's little girl do that, would we? Now why, father?"

"I suppose I could tell you shortly that we have to make distinctions between human beings; but if you pressed me much further I should have to think a long time before I could answer you," Mr. Lincoln had said smiling. "And even then I don't know that I could satisfy you."

And, actually, he never had answered her question. It remained among the many unanswered questions of childhood. . . .

And now, here was the case of Frances. She liked Frances—or she had once liked her, she could not tell to-day. And yet, it had never, for instance, entered her mind to ask Frances to come and play tennis at the farm. It was not a question of social distinctions. In so small a village any pretty and respectable young girl was of importance. But, in the case of Frances, their intercourse was limited to a few friendly words as they passed one another in the street. It was cruel, of course. But it was South Africa. It was the world. It was the first instinct—the instinct of self-protection. Officially colour was a danger that threatened to undermine civilisation; although, unofficially, the Kaffir locations were abounding with little yellow children whose mothers were quite black.

"Well," said Emery with a little smile. "Have you forgiven me?"

"You mustn't care what I think," said Miriam.

"But I do care," he answered.

Miriam looked before her motionlessly.

"I do care," he repeated.

What was she to say?

"And if," he continued, "you tell me not to walk with——"

She shook her head in protest. "I don't tell you," she said.

"But tell me," he demanded. "Tell me. Don't you know I would do anything in the world for you?"

Never in her life had Miriam been so shocked, so frightened, so pleased. Then time had not beaten her yet!

She got up from her bench.

"You mustn't say things like that," she said feebly.

He stood up, too, as shocked, as frightened, as pleased as she was.

"I don't know how I came to speak like that," he said breathlessly. "Won't you—forget it?"

§ 4

But Miriam did not forget it. She treasured it. She wished for nothing more. She was satisfied. She had had the answer to all her questioning.

For several weeks after Emery did not come to the Hugos. And then, one day, Dr. Hugo arrived home with a serious face.

"Poor Maytham has had a hæmorrhage," he said. "I want you to come with me now to attend to him. He won't be able to be moved for a while, but if he gets over this, we'll have to have him here till he can manage by himself again. You won't mind?"

Miriam shook her head silently.

"He'll get better attention than at the hospital," Dr. Hugo continued. "Are you ready to come at once?"

It was with conflicting emotions that Miriam sat beside her husband in the car as they drove up to the Empire Hotel. However much she might pity Maytham, she could not feel about him as she would have felt if this thing had happened to her husband or her father. She realised suddenly that although she thought of this man twenty times as often as she thought of, say, her father, she would rather he suffered than that her father suffered; although Emery interested her more than her husband interested her, although she took greater trouble to win his appreciation than she took to win her husband's appreciation, when it came to the ultimate facts of life he did not matter as her husband mattered. She was not bound to him by that intimacy which made the tragedies of those who were hers her tragedies; which made her one with them in success or failure, and in joy and sorrow. After everything was said, she considered him from without, and not from within.

Yet, when she entered his narrow, ugly room with the pathetic pictures he treasured on the faded green walls, and met the look in his eyes as he moved them towards the door in the only sign he gave in recognition of their coming, Miriam felt that here was something she could not bear. He was going to die, she thought, and she was frightened. Death, the ceasing of life, was to her something so awful that she could not contemplate it even impersonally. All irrevocability terrified her, and Death was the great and final irrevocability.

Dr. Hugo told her what she had to do and she looked at him, outwardly calm and receptive. "I am wiring to town for a nurse," he said, "but I don't think she can be here before to-morrow afternoon or evening. In the meantime, you'll have to stay with him. I'll go along now and find out if old Mrs. Croft will give you a hand. Be a plucky little girl. He'll get over this. I guarantee it."

She forced herself to a smile.

"If you say so, it will be so," she said, and meant her words literally.

§ 5

The nurse arrived the next evening, a big, dark-eyed young woman, bright and attractive in her navy-blue cape and veil. She had been given a room in the hotel, and in a few moments her dressing-table held an array of toilet-things and beauty-aids, her pink silk Japanese dressing-gown hung over her bed, and beside the bed, her pink satin slippers kept the dressing-gown in countenance. Half an hour later she was in Emery's room, whitely starched, the capable professional. She made Miriam feel palely incompetent, but she bespoke Miriam's assistance for the afternoons.

Miriam's association with Sister Lane was a unique experience for her. Admittedly Sister Lane had only one interest in life—men. She talked about nothing else. About the men she had known, and the men who had admired her, and the man she hoped to marry. About the men other nurses had married, about the men who kept flats for friends of hers in London, and gave them "simply everything." She knew the most extraordinarily intimate gossip about people with whose existence Miriam was acquainted only through the medium of illustrated papers. According to Sister Lane, they were all—the society people in England—an absolutely abandoned set of degenerates. "So-and-so? My dear (Sister Lane said "my dear" habitually), *her* husband doesn't mind. Of course, he knows all about it, but, as long as she doesn't interfere with him, he doesn't interfere with her. Oh, I tell you, Jimmy doesn't worry. . . . You *are* innocent, Mrs. Hugo. But now, don't you tell your husband about all this. He mightn't like it. Remember, it's in confidence."

Miriam, for all her thirty-six years, felt youthfully inexperienced and simple in the presence of Sister Lane. She tried to appear indifferent, to turn the conversation on to impersonal lines, but whatever went through the sewer of Sister Lane's mind came out with the same sexual taint at the other end. And finally she could not bear it any longer, and told Sister Lane so. At which Sister Lane smiled at her cynically.

And still she was, without doubt, an excellent nurse, and a handsome, vigorous, and physically agreeable woman.

When Dr. Hugo came into the room, she stood beside him, calmly and alertly competent, a ready answer to all his questions, a record of correct conduct behind her.

Dr. Hugo smiled his friendly smile at her, and she answered it modestly and compliantly.

"An excellent woman," said Dr. Hugo to Miriam.

"Yes, a splendid nurse," agreed Miriam, with a difference; and felt that not possibly could she repeat to her husband the things Sister Lane had told her.

§ 6

And yet they had a kind of inverted influence on her. She could not ignore them in her mind. She found herself wondering ironically what Sister Lane would have made of Emery's attitude towards herself. "I would do anything in the world for you," he had said to Miriam. . . .

And, as she wondered, something which had seemed to Miriam rather pretty and romantic began to take on different characteristics. For a moment here and there she saw Emery's devotion through the bright, vulgar eyes of Sister Lane. The soul of Sister Lane hovered over it and it became tainted. And not only tainted, but, in the presence of that weak and attenuated piece of humanity lying on the bed, ridiculous.

Miriam tried to reconcile her feeling for Emery with the things she had read about married women and their connection with men who were not their husbands. It did not fit at all. In books there seemed to be one inevitable goal towards which the unfortunate protagonists were driven as on a hurricane. Love and lovers. She drew back mentally. But if not love and lovers, then what? A flaccid flirtation? She examined the position with honest eyes.

And, first of all, she asked herself: What was this thing they called flirtation? . . . She answered her own question. A man wanted from a woman—a woman wanted from a man—a tribute to his or her sexual attraction. Nothing more. It was the tribute that any artist wanted from his critic. "Grant me that I am an artist!" . . . A woman, because she was a woman, was a man's critic. A man, because he was a man, was a woman's critic. "Grant me," said in effect the man to the woman, "Grant me that I am a man." . . . "Grant me," said the woman to the man, "that I am a woman." . . . And this flirtation was simply the business of luring that tribute!

Yet the word had an ugly sound to Miriam. It had a cheap and common sound. But then why should it not have? Was not all humanity cheap and common? And did not all humanity have to subscribe to the cheap and common needs of all humanity?

She sat and looked at Emery—at his exhausted, unshaven face—and despised herself the more as she pitied him. She attended to his pathetic needs, eased and comforted his thin body; and as she worked for him he grew farther away from her.

In proportion as she helped him, he ceased for her to be a man at all!

CHAPTER VI

§ 1

In the end it was as Dr. Hugo had prophesied. Emery Maytham recovered from his hæmorrhage. It left him exhausted and fleshless, but, at least, it left him alive.

A week later they removed him to their house, and, within a month, he was staying at their farm. It was summer-time now, and Dr. Hugo had advised him to sleep in the open. The idea of his going to the farm had followed as a matter of course.

Now, at week-ends, when Miriam and Conrad came out, Emery welcomed them to their own home. They always found the house full of flowers, cool drinks made, even sandwiches cut. He enjoyed his little opportunity of domesticity, and tried by attention to their comfort to express his gratitude. He felt as if, by their instrumentality, he had had a reprieve of life.

"It's extraordinary," he said to Dr. Hugo. "But having got through that hæmorrhage, I feel as if I am beginning all over again. I used to be worried by the thought of sickness. I'm not any more. Now I know I'm going to recover absolutely."

But the eyes he kept on Dr. Hugo's face held an anxious question.

"Why, of course," said Dr. Hugo heartily. "You're going to be all right, my dear fellow."

"Is he?" Miriam asked her husband afterwards.

Dr. Hugo made a gesture of impotence.

"It has happened," he answered. "But with Maytham—well, I don't know."

§ 2

But it was not always at Dr. Hugo's face that Maytham looked for answers to his questionings. He still looked as before at Miriam's face, searching for the little more than pity he used to find there. It seemed to him that all it held now was just the pity. He could not understand it. He could see no reason why anything should be different. He himself did not feel different, only more than ever grateful.

It was not, he told himself, that he had been presumptuous. He knew well and bitterly his position in the world. If now and then there flashed across his mind thoughts—ridiculous, impossible thoughts—they were, however ridiculous and impossible, nothing but thoughts. "I would do anything in the world for you," he had said, and what he wanted in return was just that little more than pity—in other words, a sympathetic acknowledgments of his proffered devotion. So small were his demands that they did not even seem to him a disloyalty to Dr. Hugo.

He had had other ideas about women and love in his time, fierce and romantic ideas. He had said, following the artistic tradition of his life, that the world might be well lost for a great love. He had known the ardour that so often inflames the consumptive, and that is so much more ironically powerful than the passion of the average healthy man. But to-day he saw all that was past. The romance had stayed. The fierceness had gone.

Something of what was in his mind Miriam understood. Only now she no longer felt that Emery was a romantic figure. And when he looked at her with those hurt-looking blue eyes of his she experienced a kind of impatience. It annoyed her to remember that only a little while ago she had spent days thinking of this man, of this pathetic, consumptive fellow; and not from the point of view of his pathos and consumption, but from the point of view of his manhood. She had dressed and spoken and acted to attract him.

She looked at him now with critical eyes, at the way his trousers hung about his thin legs; at his bony hands, the hollows in his cheeks, his anxious eyes. Poor Emery! But what a fool she had been!

Now she was more kind to him than ever before; and yet it was all different, and they both knew it.

§ 3

After a time Emery returned to his room at the Empire Hotel and to his work at the bank; and, although it seemed that the old relations were maintained between him and the Hugos, they were maintained only superficially. Instead of his illness having brought them closer together, it had thrust them farther apart. In these days Emery's visits to his friends partook of the nature of a formal expression of gratitude. The old easy terms were gone. His visits grew rarer, and when he did come, there were difficult excuses to make.

And yet he could not stay away altogether from these people who had so befriended him, and he did not know what to do.

Of the three only Dr. Hugo was unconscious of any strain.

One evening he called for him at the bank and brought him home to dinner.

"Do you know," he said to him as they were sitting down, "it's nearly three weeks since you were here last? What on earth have you been doing with yourself all the time?"

Emery's face reddened slightly. "Haven't you had enough of me yet?"

"My dear chap!"

"As for what I've been doing," Emery added with deliberation, "I've been entering into the social life of Adam's Rest. Last week I went to a bridge party and a dance."

"What dance?" asked Miriam.

Emery helped himself to salt with a hand a little unsteady.

"A dance," he said, "given by Mrs. Maxwell. Not that I danced much, of course."

"Mrs. Maxwell?"

"Yes."

"Did she ask you herself?"

"No. Frances came into the bank one day and invited me. So, naturally, I went."

"Why," Miriam wanted to say, "why 'naturally'? It was an impertinence on Frances's part to ask you to her dance." . . . That was what she wanted to say. But what she would actually have meant was: "It was an impertinence on Frances's part to ask any one to her house who comes to my house."

A brutal thought. She hated herself for it, and gripped her lips into silence. Strange how, although she was impatient of the man himself, she still had her old jealously proprietorial feeling about him.

"Would you have refused?" asked Emery, addressing himself to Dr. Hugo.

"It's a difficult position in a small place like this," admitted Dr. Hugo. "Because you really can't pretend that you don't know everybody. And it's a delicate matter limiting your intercourse as in the ordinary way."

"Then what would you have done?"

"You mustn't ask me," smiled Dr. Hugo. "I'm Dutch, and we Dutch have very hard and fast rules about colour. Whatever our attitude may be unofficially, officially black blood is damnation. We're like the Southern United States there."

"So," persisted Emery, "you wouldn't have gone?"

"No. I personally wouldn't have gone."

There was silence for a moment.

And then, suddenly, Emery sprang up from his chair and spoke in a loud, angry voice,—

"Well, if that's the attitude of the people here, then all I can say is I'm glad I went. And, what's more, I'm going again."

His eyes were shining with violent feeling.

"It's the damned cruelty of it," he said. "I hate cruelty."

Dr. Hugo had stood up too. Now he put his hand on the younger man's arm. It was a friendly, compelling grip. "Sit down, my dear chap. That's all right. We've got our different points of view, and, for all I know, yours may be the right point of view. Anyhow, I admire your spirit. Sit down. Do."

Emery sat down. The evening passed quietly. Nothing further was said about colour. But when Emery rose to go, he looked at Miriam with a strange expression in his eyes. It was an expression of subtle defiance, and yet it pleaded with her too.

CHAPTER VII

§ 1

As if it were a game—a thing invented—Life now offered to show Miriam the obverse side of the shield.

Since Miriam's child had died at birth, they had been, as a family, peculiarly exempt from sickness. People, other than natives, did not lightly get ill and die at Adam's Rest. Now Emery's trouble had fallen across their path, and hardly had they, as it were, swept that away, when another trouble faced them. This time it was Martin.

During the last year he had had several attacks of what he called colic. But Dr. Hugo called it gall-stones, and had advised him to have an operation. While an attack lasted, Martin had no hesitation in agreeing to the operation. Indeed, he would have been almost as ready to agree to electrocution or to any other more or less neat means of ending an intolerable existence. He thought it, in any case, impossible that a man could survive such pain as he was suffering. It was a pain that seemed to tear its way through all his vitals upwards to his right shoulder-blade. He explained it to Dr. Hugo: "It's as if some one had stuck a knife up me, and then given it a sudden twist." The pain continued sometimes for a day, and sometimes for more than a day, and even morphia did not always completely assuage it; although it stopped those grinding muscular contractions, and gave the stone a chance to slip away, either to go back again, or to go onwards into the intestines. Martin would beg for more morphia and more morphia —for an overdose even.

But suddenly everything would be over. The obstructing gall-stone would force itself through. Miraculously the pain would cease. It would leave him in an exhausted perspiration, but so relieved that within a day the thought of what he had suffered was like a dream. It would seem incredible that he had really thought he was going to die, had actually, in his extremity, agreed to submit himself to an operation. . . . An operation! Martin had heard too much of these operations!

He put the case to Dr. Hugo in the old business-like style on which he prided himself.

"Now, Conrad, do you seriously tell me to go and risk an operation? You know the position I'm in. If I leave off working for a moment, what becomes of Janet and the children? However successful the operation may be, it means months lost. And then who says it will be successful?"

Dr. Hugo was slow in replying.

"Can you," persisted Martin, "or any other man say that an operation is going to be successful?"

"No," said Dr. Hugo. "Not being God Almighty, I can't. I can only give it as my opinion that the chances are strongly—very strongly in the case of a powerful man like you—that it will be successful. That is the most any one can say. And that is what I am prepared to say."

"But even if it is successful," continued Martin, "what about the shock to the system? How many years doesn't a thing like that take off a man's life!"

He paused rhetorically.

"Then you prefer to go on having these attacks?" said Dr. Hugo quietly.

Martin frowned his impatience.

"I may not have any more."

Dr. Hugo shook his head.

"You always were an optimist, Martin," he said.

He leaned back on his chair, his brown eyes penetratingly on Martin, and yet softening at the thought that it was Martin's own body Martin was considering. How difficult it was to put oneself in the other man's position, to say: "This thing, this terrible bloody thing, is going to happen to me—to me—to this very self of mine."

Martin was speaking again,—

"And there's the expense of the operation. You say you won't operate on me yourself. Well, then, who's going to pay for it? *I* can't. And who's going to support my wife and children while I can't work? And what will happen to them if I don't get over it? These are things that a man in your position doesn't have to consider, but I've got to face them all as well as the question of the operation itself. The more I think of it, the more impossible I see it is. No, Conrad, I'll take my chance about the attacks. I won't be operated on, and that's the end of it."

Nevertheless, as time went on, as his attacks grew more frequent, and (though it had seemed inconceivable) more violent, Martin found himself compelled to revise his ideas about an operation. And suddenly, one day, he came to Dr. Hugo. "All right. I give in. Do anything you like with me. I don't care what happens."

When it came to the point, it was characteristic of Martin that he no longer troubled himself about questions of finance, and the problematical future of his wife and children. These things, he now maintained defiantly, would settle themselves. He was facing a matter of life and death. And in matters of life and death, considerations of money ought not to stand in the way. As reluctant as he once had been to have the operation, so eager was he now to put the whole affair to the test, and be done with it.

And thus, as if it had been specially arranged for the sake of the contrast, Miriam was able to compare Janet's attitude towards Martin with her own attitude towards Emery.

Emery had filled her thoughts, had vitalised existence for her. But yet, when it came to the ultimate essentials, she had found that, after all, he was not hers, his fate was outside her life.

How different it was with Janet and Martin! In the circumstances of their everyday existence, Janet thought of Martin little more than she thought of her table or her chair. She spoke to him if she chose; or, if she did not choose, she remained silent. She sat with him, or she left him alone. It did not matter whether, in his presence, she wore her oldest clothes; went about stoutly uncorseted; screwed her luxuriant brown hair away from her ears and forehead and into a little tight knot in the nape of her neck; left her face unpowdered; looked her age, and more than her age. It did not matter if she lost her temper, and was less polite to him than to other people. She did not care whether he saw her best side or her worst side. He was there; he was not there. It was all the same. . . .

But now Martin was in vital trouble; and, suddenly, to Janet, the whole world was in vital trouble. Now she knew he was her very man. They had been young together and had loved, they had shared happiness and privation. His children were her children. His fate was her fate.

Janet had little romance in her. She was not analytical as Miriam was. She did not stab the present with sweet barbs from the past. But she felt violently and she felt tenderly that Martin was hers and that they were one.

The day before Martin left Adam's Rest for Kimberley to have his operation, Janet sat beside him, her head against his shoulder, her two hands stroking his hard, shiny, digger's hand; comforting him. Every now and then, the tears would come to her eyes, and she would run out into the yard and scold the children fiercely. She would come back with a careful smile on her lips and an anxious look in her eyes.

It was true that gall-stones were not as romantic as consumption, that the digestive organs were somehow rather vulgar in comparison with respiratory organs; but yet, when it came to the point, a husband was a husband, and the other man was—the other man.

§ 2

The operation was over. It had been a highly successful operation. They had relieved Martin of a hundred and twenty-six gall-stones. There they were. He could count them himself.

It had seemed to Martin an astounding and unprecedented thing that any one should have one hundred and twenty-six gall-stones. He could not believe that other people had had even more. He felt that he had achieved something historical. He was as proud of those gall-stones as if he had specially created them to win a competition in gall-stones. He could not leave off talking about them. He preserved them in a bottle, and showed them to people. Now, at last, he did full justice to the terrible pain they had given him during those attacks, described at length his experiences before the operation, during and after the operation. It all added to the importance of the gall-stones.

The only thing he did not mention about the operation was that Dr. Hugo had paid for it. But, of course, he meant one day to return the money.

For the rest of his life Martin had now three persistent topics of conversation. When he was not boasting about his children, he was boasting about his gall-stones; and when he was not discussing either his children or his gall-stones, he was naturally complaining about his overwhelming, perpetual, and undeserved bad luck.

§ 3

He seemed, indeed, to be unluckier at digging than other men. He had had that one splendid piece of good fortune when he had found the pocket in Baboon's Gully; at the same time he had had his chance to retrieve himself and he had lost it. It was as if the rest of his life had been designed as a punishment.

The operation was over and forgotten, the feelings it had called to light were over and forgotten too. When he came home for week-ends now there were, as before, recriminations from Janet. . . . "Look at the rags I have to go about in. Look at the state of the house. Look at the boys. They haven't a decent suit between them, or a whole pair of shoes. The Crofts are better dressed than we are."

Often Janet had to ask her father or sister for help. But Mr. Lincoln was nearing seventy, and more inactive than ever. His customers bought their patent medicines and toilet materials too often at the general shops, and he had come to depend chiefly on the making up of infrequent medical prescriptions. Not that it worried him. Mr. Lincoln had never been interested in his business—he had never demanded more of material success than just the ability to pay his way—and, as time went on, he grew less than ever interested in it. He was sinking farther and farther back into the past—into his old histories and the reflections they engendered. He was joining himself to that which had been. "How wise Nature is," he used to say. "She tires a man out. And when the time comes for him to close his eyes, he is ready to sleep."

So lately he had found a difficulty in helping Janet, and it was to Miriam that Janet nearly always turned now in moments of pecuniary stress. Sometimes Miriam helped her readily, but sometimes she was more grudging. She was more grudging as she was more jealous of the difference between Janet's children and her own

Isabel. However much she loved Isabel, she could not but feel Isabel's deficiencies. She felt them as if they were her own deficiencies. They were a reproach to her. Where Isabel failed, she had failed. And yet, at the same time, she could will her utmost but she could not put a spark of her own quick mentality into Isabel. The child had no eagerness in her, no indignation. Nothing delighted her and nothing angered her. She took a certain calm satisfaction in her food and clothes, rather enjoyed sewing and knitting; but, for the rest, she was invincibly placid, inertly content.

Away from her Miriam yearned towards her, felt self-condemningly that she, Miriam, might be responsible for the faults she attributed to Isabel. She blamed herself for her lack of patience, told herself that she did not try hard enough to interest the girl, to awaken her consciousness, to reach the depths of her being. She determined to be gentler, more tactful.

Often she looked at Isabel as she lay sleeping—a pink, healthy little mortal, and she could hardly wait for the morrow to arrive so that she might try again, begin all over again.

And the morrow would come, and it would be the same old story. She would talk to Isabel, attempt to interest her; she would smile, would curb her growing irritation, but it would all be useless. There was no response from Isabel. It was all a flatness, a blankness; a stupidity only redeemed from any connection with idiocy by its utter healthiness.

She would be glad to see Isabel go away to school—to be relieved of her presence. And, in the first flush of her anger, she would wonder miserably how it could happen that to her, whose whole being was an inner aliveness, should come this soulless child. She felt as if she had been betrayed. Where did Isabel get it from —this thick placidity? Not from any one in her own family, she was sure of that. She would find herself looking with a sudden resentment at her husband. Somewhere in the Hugo blood it must be, the germ that had made Isabel what she was.

Conrad would look up to meet her hard eyes.

"What is the matter, Miriam?" And at the sound of his voice Miriam would be ashamed of her momentary disloyalty.

"Isabel," she would answer. "Oh, Conrad, I don't know what to do with her."

It was an old complaint, and Conrad was impatient with it in proportion as he shared Miriam's feeling.

"My dear Miriam, from your manner one might think that the child was an imbecile. Isabel may be a little slow, still she is a perfectly normal healthy child."

"But compare her with Stanley, who is younger than she is."

"That's the trouble with you, Miriam. You will torture yourself with comparisons. Why not take Isabel for what she is? Why compare her with anybody? And why particularly with Stanley, who is an outstandingly bright boy?"

"All Janet's children are outstandingly bright boys," Miriam would comment bitterly.

"And you are jealous."

"Yes, I'm jealous."

She would leave the room to hide her gathering tears.

If, at times like these, Janet came with her accustomed plea for money, Miriam received her coldly. Then it would be uphill work for Janet, whose sensitiveness, however, was becoming dulled by many layers of similar experiences. In the end, Miriam would generally help her, but not without a certain ruthless satisfaction in the thought that, however successful Janet's boys might be, from the worldly point of view Janet's life was a failure. It was a thought which, as her anger cooled down, astonished Miriam with its malevolence. She would find herself unconsciously praying, as when a child, for a better heart.

§ 4

Nevertheless, there was a quarrel between Janet and Miriam one day, and it happened when Janet was asking Miriam for money. There was no denying that Janet had been tactless. She had inferred that Miriam could make no better use of her money than to assist her—Janet's—boys. She had even said something about college in time to come. "I wouldn't have spoken about college," she had blundered on, "if you had had a child of your own to send to college——"

"We are sending Isabel," interrupted Miriam in a hard voice, defiantly maternal.

If only then Janet had had the wit to protect herself by a reference to Isabel's sex in excuse for her remark, the trouble might still have been avoided. Instead, she said nothing, but a little smile, a little self-satisfied, incredulous smile, played about her lips. She might as well have shouted: "What a joke! Send Isabel to college! But you know you don't mean it. Even you don't compare Isabel with my boys."

Miriam's face went white, her throat tightened.

"We are sending Isabel, of course," she repeated in a voice almost inaudible with passion. "After all, we aren't in such a position that she will have to go to work as soon as possible to assist her parents as your boys will."

Other words had passed. For nearly a year—right into the bitter year of 1914—the sisters did not speak. It had been an ugly affair. But Janet's boys had, as ever, been free of Miriam's home, and she still gave them the presents which were so much more necessary than complimentary. And, even against her will, through all her jealousy and resentment, nothing could prevent Miriam from loving Felix more and more as he grew older and bigger and ever fuller of charm and splendid promise.

CHAPTER VIII

§ 1

As Miriam walked down The Street one summer day she met Emery Maytham walking with Frances Maxwell. Emery raised his hat gravely, but, although Miriam would have spoken to either of them individually, she could not speak to them in association—a white man, a friend of hers, in the company of a coloured girl.

She passed them with a nod, and a little way farther down The Street she came upon Carrie Lowe. It seemed to Miriam that there was a little more than her usual ironical malignancy in Carrie's yellow eyes, but her acknowledgment of Miriam's "Good-afternoon, Carrie," was, as always, conformably respectful.

It was strange how, under that almost excessive respectfulness of Carrie's, Miriam sensed a sneering hostility.

Still farther on she encountered Freddie Croft. It seemed as if all the Crofts were parading The Street this day. Freddie Croft was now a dignified citizen, approaching middle-age, and putting on weight. He was in these days running a store of his own. It had happened like this: an idea had come to Freddie, and he had suddenly renewed a tender relationship with his brother Henry. He had stood him drinks in the white bar, invited him to his house; had begun to take an interest in his children, his cattle, his carpentering, his general steady prosperity. It was true Freddie's magnanimity did not extend to the black woman Henry called his wife, but no one, not even Henry or the woman herself, expected that. Henry, indeed, was humbly grateful to be taken notice of at all by any member of his family—he had been for so many years ostracised—and he overflowed now with goodwill to Freddie; respected him as a man of the world, a salesman in a white man's shop, the husband of a white woman, and the father of practically white children.

He thought Freddie very knowing; and when Freddie suggested his idea of opening a shop in partnership with Henry, suggested it, not diffidently, but with an air of letting Henry in on the ground floor of a good thing, Henry betrayed the caution struggling in his bosom, agreed with reckless defiance, and put up the money like a man.

Henry had himself, under Freddie's direction, assisted in the building of the shop. The shop was a simple affair; four sides and a roof of corrugated iron, counters and shelves on three sides of the shop, and, on the fourth side, a door and two windows. On the left of the shop as one entered, was the grocery, hardware, and patent medicine department. Opposite the door was the boots and Gents' department. On the right was the soft goods and Ladies' department. That was the way the shop looked in which Freddie had worked for so many years, and he could conceive of no other way in which a shop might be made.

Now he ran the shop with the assistance of his niece, Carrie's daughter, Maudie, already emancipated from school; and on Saturdays and other busy days Henry gave him a hand, too. The rest of the week Henry went on with his carpentering work.

Freddie was now more than ever the gentleman, an example of how a man could rise who kept himself white; and he greeted Miriam with an unctuous suavity as he passed her. He was, Miriam thought, more unctuous than ever he had been before. It was as if he carried an amusing secret.

For some indefinable reason Miriam was seeing everything darkly on this day of bright sunshine.

§ 2

Dr. Hugo was a little late for dinner. And when he came home it was with an air of angry suppression. Miriam wondered. But she knew her husband. His feelings had been deeply touched and so he could not speak.

In summer-time the Hugos always had dinner in the open garden overlooking the river. Excepting the early mornings, this was the only time during the light of day when it was pleasant to be outside.

Now the bronze river no longer looked like molten metal boiling in a great crucible, shining whitely with heat as at midday. Now it seemed to be asleep. Rosy clouds from the west lay across its dark depths as in a flushed dream; a little breeze came from it like a contented sigh. As the glow of sunset faded the trees along the bank on the opposite side crept huddling together, and merged. . . .

Conrad and Miriam finished dinner, and the Kaffir maid removed the things from the table. Dr. Hugo took out his pipe and began filling it from his tobacco pouch. He thrust the tobacco tightly down into the bowl with his forefinger, and, as he did so, said to Miriam,—

"I suppose you've heard the news."

"No. What news?"

"Then you haven't heard? About Maytham?"

"Has anything happened to him? I saw him only this afternoon."

"Didn't you speak to him?"

"No. He was with Frances Maxwell."

"I see. Well, the news is that he's going to marry Frances Maxwell."

As Dr. Hugo spoke, Miriam felt as if she had long ago known that this would happen. And yet she was shocked and strangely agitated. But by what emotion? She could hardly tell.

Dr. Hugo was still prodding at his tobacco. She heard herself saying calmly,—

"Who told you?"

"It seems every one knows about it."

Yes. Certainly every one knew about it. Miriam remembered the charged looks of Carrie and Freddie—their voiceless suggestion of—now she could place it—of overwhelming triumph. To good purpose indeed had the Crofts kept themselves white. Now they were rewarded. This was no ordinary success that Frances had achieved, and in which the whole family shared. Here was no common white man Frances had captured—no digger, no carpenter, no policeman, no barman. Emery

Maytham was a gentleman, a man whom all the girls in Adam's Rest had run after, a friend of the Hugos. Not only a friend of the Hugos. Listen: A particular friend of *Mrs.* Hugo's!

Miriam remembered Carrie's yellow eyes with their veiled insinuation; her deferential manner hiding that baleful sneer; her soft voice remarking, "I hear you're having a very gay time nowadays." . . . Her eyes, her manner, her voice, Miriam understood them all. What Carrie meant was: "We are both just women, don't forget that. And you are no better than I am, although your skin is whiter, and you have had more luck."

Now all the Crofts would tell one another amusing things about Emery's white friends. (They would call him Emery, of course—he would be completely sucked down by the Crofts.) They would picture the chagrin of the girls of Adam's Rest, and the discomfiture of Mrs. Hugo. Particularly the discomfiture of Mrs. Hugo; because they had gone to school with her, and because she had always "kept herself proud" towards them.

If any one ever knew how Miriam had thought about Emery Maytham, Carrie knew. Or so, at least, Miriam felt.

A humiliation, a self-contempt, a hatred for Emery, rushed over her. He had put shame on them all; and particularly on her, Miriam. He had betrayed his civilisation.

Dr. Hugo had lit his pipe and was pulling at it, trying to make it draw. Miriam felt her face set hard in the darkness.

"Have you spoken to him since you heard?" she asked.

"No," said Dr. Hugo. "No, I haven't. And I don't want to. The bloody idiot. With his artistic temperament."

It was not often that Dr. Hugo swore. When he did, it was not in a manner of amiable lightness. And Miriam knew that his whole Dutch heart was in revolt against the thing which Emery had done.

"If we meet him," she asked, "what shall we do?"

"That is the only satisfactory part," said Dr. Hugo. "We shan't meet him again, I understand. He has been transferred to another branch. It appears they have been engaged for some time, and they will be married here to-morrow and leave at once."

§ 3

That night, lying awake on her bed under the pepper tree, it was chiefly of Carrie Miriam thought. More than anybody Miriam hated Carrie because Maytham was marrying Frances. She hardly thought of Frances. In any case, Frances would leave Adam's Rest. But Carrie would remain, openly deferential, secretly exultant. Miriam felt that she could not bear to meet Carrie's yellow eyes.

But why, she asked herself, did she feel like that? What was it to her more than to any other woman in Adam's Rest that Maytham was marrying Frances? Had she loved him? She denied it. Yet he had mattered to her, she could not deny that. There had been a time when his devotion had seemed important, when it had seemed to tell her that the years had not yet defeated her and that her womanhood still counted.

But then Maytham had been sick, and his physical weakness—the assistance she had given him—had made of him, in her eyes, a poor human thing, and no longer an affair of shadowy romance. She had turned from him, rejected him spiritually.

And he had gone over to Frances Maxwell. He had thrust her out of his thoughts and substituted Frances. It had been one to him, Miriam or Mrs. Croft's grandchild, the cousin of Henry's black children. For all she knew he was, at this moment, in the egoism of possession, wondering how in the presence of Frances's rich youth he had made a fool of himself over an almost middle-aged married woman. Perhaps he was despising her as she despised him!

She had given him her thoughts for a year—to this man who, in a few hours, would be the husband of Frances. That was the galling thing. And, in her rage of self-contempt, she felt that she could not sufficiently punish herself.

She sat up in bed suddenly, her heart beating. Yes. But she would punish herself. A bright moon was in the sky. She looked at her watch where it hung from the black rail of her iron bed. It was two o'clock. She threw off the thin kaross of jackal-skin which lay at the foot of her bed, and which she pulled up as the night hours grew cooler; and, without thinking again, got out of bed and walked over to her husband. He was sleeping with his head on his arm; he looked young, she thought, in the light of the moon. She spoke his name, and he woke quickly.

"Hallo, Miriam. What's wrong?"

"I want to tell you something."

"Can't you sleep? You must be cold."

"No, I'm not. I've got something on my mind."

"Something on your mind?" Dr. Hugo was a little impatient. His attitude suggested that she might have waited until the morning.

"You'll despise me, but I don't care."

Dr. Hugo sat up in bed and looked at his wife.

"You're not well, Miriam. Come here. I'll cover you with my kaross."

"No. Let me tell you first. It's about Emery Maytham."

"Maytham? . . ."

With her husband's eyes on her, Miriam found it suddenly difficult to explain. But, characteristically, she exaggerated rather than diminished her fault.

"I was mad about him for a time."

"About Maytham?" Her husband's naïve surprise that anybody could be "mad" about Maytham added, if possible, to her humiliation.

"I knew that he admired me, and I tried to attract his admiration."

Good Heavens, how silly it sounded! She could have wept at the mere silliness of it. It would have been better to have a serious crime to confess. But this vague business of an affair of the mind! At least, a crime was not ridiculous. . . .

"I thought of him all the time, and I wanted to please him."

She was like a child trying to clear her conscience of a childish folly. Never again, she knew, would she re-establish her dignity in her husband's eyes. But she would not stop now.

"It was," she whispered, "because I was afraid I couldn't any more attract a man. And I saw I could attract him!"

Her husband was silent.

"That was all," she said, and turned away.

Conrad sprang up at that, sat her down on his bed, and put his kaross round her. Now she began to cry—angry at her weakness and stupidity, yet feeling like a child that wanted comfort.

"And wasn't I of any importance to you then?" asked Conrad.

"I don't know. But I thought I wasn't important to you."

"Don't you understand I think of no one else?"

"Consciously?" It seemed a funny word for a weeping woman to use. Through her tears Miriam's lips twitched into a doleful smile.

"How do you mean 'consciously'?"

"Wasn't I just a habit with you? Like shaving or dressing? You can't realise a woman you have lived with for ten years. You don't definitely think of her. She doesn't mean anything separate to you any more. I wanted to prove to myself I was still a woman."

"And Maytham was able to prove it to you?"

Her husband's incredulity made her wince. He could not, apparently, honour Maytham by even thinking it conceivable that he might have roused his wife's interest. A poor invalid, he thought him; a fool as an artist; a failure as a man. And now, on top of it, a betrayer of his white civilisation. "The bloody idiot," he had called him that evening. "With his artistic temperament!"

"And do you still feel like this about him?" Conrad demanded.

"Oh, no, no!" said Miriam eagerly. "Not since he had that hæmorrhage and I nursed him. Then I began to think of him as just an unfortunate man, and I was ashamed of my—other thoughts. Now, his marrying Frances. It's made me lose my last bit of self-respect—the comparison."

"I see," said Dr. Hugo, and almost understood, for the first time, a few things he had studied about women professionally. He looked at his wife sitting there with the kaross around her, confessing. Her hair was in two fair plaits down her back, her eyes followed his pleadingly. Every now and then a belated tear ran down her cheeks and she gave a little sniff. Poor Miriam! Nothing but a child, after all. He felt suddenly inexpressibly tender towards her. As if she were his little daughter, and he wanted to comfort her. He put his arms round her, kissed her unsteady lips.

"You little poor dear," he said. He stroked her hair away from her forehead. "You needn't worry that I don't realise you. I've never in all my life loved you as much as I do now." He lifted her face and smiled at her. "To-morrow," he declared, "we'll put aside our colour prejudice for once, and drink to the health of the young couple. Just you and I. Shall we?"

Miriam gave her husband an end of the kaross he had wrapped her in, and nestled closer to him. "How good you are, Conrad," she said. "I don't deserve it. I'm too happy."

PART III

CHAPTER I

§ 1

It was three years since the Great War had begun. It affected Adam's Rest a little, but not much. The people in Adam's Rest found it an interesting topic of conversation. The price of diamonds in the neighbouring diggings fell, the cost of living rose, and the natives, as was usual during any period of crisis, starved. Several men went to fight in German South-West Africa, and a few went overseas. Adam's Rest was proud of them, and their relations felt very important and self-sacrificing. The war, on the whole, was taken very sportingly; and it was playfully referred to as "The Great Game." People read in the papers that men sang as they went over the top, and that the general attitude of soldiers appeared to be that they could not restrain themselves in their anxiety to be in the thick of the fighting. The soldiers themselves wrote mild letters home asking how every one was getting along at Adam's Rest, and saying that they were quite well, too. The Belgian atrocities and the sinking of the *Lusitania* annoyed the inhabitants of Adam's Rest very much, and they spoke a good deal about wiping the Huns off the face of the earth. "Europe," they said, "isn't safe while Germany stands."

Every day the papers contained cables saying how many men had been killed and wounded, and how many ships had been sunk, and that Hill Z had been taken again. But the inhabitants of Adam's Rest took philosophically all the news that came, assuming, quite correctly, that wars could not be won without the spilling of blood. They were prepared to see the fight out, and they were never pessimistic about the result of the war. "We"—they always said "we"—"we'll fight to the last drop," they said.

Now and then a concert or dance or bazaar was given in aid of some war-fund, and the women held sewing-parties when they did work for the soldiers.

Really, in a way, the war rather brightened life in Adam's Rest than otherwise.

Whenever he came over for the week-end, Martin Webster recapitulated his experiences in the Boer War and wished (1) either that he was young enough to go, or (2) that he had a son old enough to go. After he had been talking about it for more than two years, Felix said suddenly one day: "I'll be old enough if the war keeps on much longer. I'm sixteen now, and I could easily pass for twenty."

Martin laughed indulgently. "That's the spirit," he said.

"In the meantime, don't neglect your school-work," admonished Janet.

It was a fact that the war was exciting Felix and he could not give attention to study. He could not feel that learning was of any consequence in a time when the only important thing was to kill people. The visions he had of fighting half a dozen Germans single-handed and getting the V.C. were in no way based on any ability to work out a mensuration sum or on knowing what Virgil said about the Greeks two thousand years ago. He would have felt a contempt for himself if he had been able still to take a vital interest in his school-work.

In addition, Felix was growing out of boyhood. He was tall and thin, had a terrific appetite and inexpressible yearnings. He was concerned about his clothes, and was moody and irritable and bad-tempered. He despised his relations, was impertinent to them, formed fitful attachments for peculiar people, and felt himself to be generally misunderstood. He talked a good deal about "going out into the world" and "seeing life." He considered himself a man, competent to express an opinion on any subject in the world, argued incessantly, learnt to play billiards, and laughed in a loud, cracking voice at whatever he took to be a manly joke.

At this stage he was a thoroughly difficult and disagreeable boy. But, spasmodically, something of the old Felix would appear; he would be wistfully anxious to please, desirous to do things for people, humble, gay, polite, interested—as charming as ever. It was often hard to connect his two selves; as hard as it was to realise in this tall, thin youth, with the strong nose and jutting chin and deep voice, the round-faced boy of a couple of years ago.

§ 2

Sometimes Janet looked at him and wondered that this big fellow should be her son. But she was very proud of him. She was beginning lately to pin all her hopes on her sons. Although she still loved her husband in a kind of marital way and felt herself bound up for life and death with him, she realised that, spiritually and materially, her wifehood never had yielded her much, and never would. Now let her motherhood compensate her. They would grow up, her three sons, to do her honour, and to honour her. They would be handsome, clever, rich, successful. They would come to her with their hands full, and make a dignified thing of her middle-age and old-age. People would say of her no longer, "That is the wife of Martin Webster, the hard-up digger," but "That is the mother of Felix and Claude and Stanley, who have done this, and are the other."

There was only one thing about the future that Janet dreaded—the fact that the time would come when the boys would marry, and then they would no more be hers. Already she hated the girls who were destined to be her daughters-in-law.

In other respects, despite a life of continuous struggling, Janet was still much as she had ever been. Nor had Martin changed. When he happened to find a diamond, the money was immediately used up on urgent and imperative demands. They would feel they were doing the decent thing by paying off a part of their steadily accumulating debts, and then they would promptly spend whatever was left on the recurring assumption that at last they had struck luck. If the diamond was small, they would indulge themselves in a small way. If it were rather bigger—Martin never found a really big stone—they would indulge themselve in a rather bigger way.

They would run over to Kimberley or Johannesburg—the two nearest towns—and have a week of gaiety.

They would buy themselves clothes, go to the theatres, and bet a little on the races. They would come home, their money exhausted, and start all over again. On such occasions Mr. Lincoln and Miriam would remonstrate with them; but they could not remonstrate too much, because Janet and Martin owed them money and they could not speak quite disinterestedly. Janet and Martin would take their reprimands rather argumentatively and threaten to return every penny that was owing. But they never got as far as paying off their debts completely, and, when they were in difficulties, they had no option but to approach Mr. Lincoln and Miriam again.

Yet they always had one final refuge: "When the boys grow up." It was a phrase that jealously annoyed Miriam. Why should Janet and Martin live in the smug expectation of reaping comfort and pride from the efforts of their sons when they had failed to reap comfort and pride from their own efforts? "Here," Martin sometimes said, quite in the manner of the mother of the Gracchi, "here" (he would indicate his sons) "are my investments." He lived under the impression that he had sacrificed his life and prospects to the boys, and the least they could do was to pay him back for it one day in cash and kudos.

It was not that he did not love them most sincerely; it was only that he could not disentangle his love for himself from his love for his children.

He still thought of them as the small boys who had run out to meet him on his return home during the week-ends and shouted: "Here's Daddy! Hallo, Daddy! Lift me up on to your saddle, Daddy!" Who had trotted alongside his horse with their little, eager news; who had clambered over him and played with him; who had visited him at Baboon's Gully in their clean sailor-suits and clutched his hand and asked him questions in their shrill boys' voices. . . . He still imagined that they loved and admired him for the peculiar qualities he possessed.

He had always been rather obtuse—Martin, and he did not now analyse the critical looks his sons in these days cast at him; their sudden coldnesses and embarrassments and pityings. Martin was an object of indifference to other people; but, because he loved them and made demands on them, because (despite all) they loved him and made demands on him, no one saw Martin more clearly or cruelly than did his sons.

It was an attitude that Martin was little likely to understand, for he shared the common failing of mankind—he could not see himself except from a fictional point of view. Just as no man hears his true voice or can see his own face, so no man ever knows himself for what he really is.

§ 3

The difference between Isabel and Janet's boys was not so striking now as it had been in early childhood. Isabel was still slow mentally, and it took her a long time to learn anything, but once she learnt it, she knew it. Then she had as many moral virtues as most people have if one starts calculating. She was honest, hard-working, obedient. Physically, she was well-grown; quite pretty, in a fair, placid way; rode a horse with stolid confidence; and played a game of tennis that even Felix, adolescently contemptuous as he was of most things, did not despise. "She's young, of course," he told Miriam weightily, "but, take my word for it, she'll play a decent game one day."

In any case, he thought her worth teaching, and Isabel, proud to be noticed by Felix at all, threw her whole earnest heart into the game. Miriam was happier and more hopeful about Isabel these days. "You were right," she said to her husband, "Isabel is one of those children who develop late."

Sometimes, when Miriam watched them, little half-thoughts would run across her mind. Felix and Isabel —how the years passed—perhaps one day . . . She would stop herself. Ridiculous. And yet, stranger things had happened.

She would turn her mind on to the problem of Felix's immediate future. Felix was now sixteen, at the end of this year he would matriculate. And then? . . . Well, Martin and Janet would certainly never be able to do anything for the boy, and still, it would be a pity if he did not go to college. For years now Conrad had uncomplainingly assisted her sister and brother-in-law. Could she ask him to undertake the burden of her nephew's future?

She spoke to Felix himself about it one day on the tennis court. Unfortunately, he was in one of his intractable moods.

"Do you ever," she asked him, "think about your future, Felix?"

"Of course, I do," he answered impatiently.

"What do you think about it?"

"Oh, I don't know."

"Don't answer me like that, Felix. You must know what you think. Or don't you want to tell me?"

"There's nothing to tell."

"Then we won't discuss it any more," said Miriam. "It seems useless."

"Well, how can I explain?" grumbled Felix, advancing sulkily as Miriam appeared to be retreating. "How can I say I want to do this or I want to do that, when I know all the time father's up to his ears already?"

"Is that why you don't want to speak about it?" Miriam suggested.

"Oh, I don't know," Felix evaded again.

He took a tennis ball and began absently to bounce it up and down.

"Don't do that," said Miriam, her temper rising.

Felix put the ball in his pocket. They both remained silent.

"What do you want me to tell you?" Felix finally condescended.

Miriam rose from the bench.

"Nothing," she said. "You don't deserve that any one should take an interest in you. Your manners are quite obnoxious. I don't know what's come over you lately, Felix. You used to be a nice boy. But now you're simply unbearable."

Felix's face reddened. He did not answer, but took the ball out of his pocket and began to play with it again.

Miriam walked away without another word, really angry. She felt as if she would have liked to do something violent to the boy.

She did not see him again that day. But next day, on her window-sill, she found an envelope marked "private and urgent." There was a letter in it scrawled over in Felix's ungainly handwriting.

> "Dear Auntie,—Please forgive me for my rudeness yesterday. I don't know what made me behave like that. I am honestly grateful because you take an interest in me, and I know what a lot you and Uncle Con have done for me and all of us. I'm really not as bad as you might think, and I'll do anything you want me to do. Go to college or whatever you think best. Excuse this rotten scrawl.—Your loving and repentant nephew,
>
> "Felix.
>
> "P.S.—Or rather, Infelix."

That he should have written at all touched Miriam; even the little romantic pun at the end could not detract from the genuine emotion of repentance that must have inspired him. Miriam felt her eyes moisten as she read. Again the feeling came to her, as when he was a child, that she wanted to sacrifice herself for this boy.

She put the letter away among the little things she treasured.

They neither of them ever mentioned the letter to one another. And when, for days afterwards, Felix hardly addressed her, Miriam understood.

CHAPTER II

§ 1

During the first three years of the war, Miriam thought little of herself, of her own complexities. The world, as a whole, was torturing her. She felt as if she could understand nothing any more. Right and wrong, happiness and unhappiness, life and death—they seemed no longer to have separate meanings. In childhood she had known well to differentiate between right and wrong—one had rules; these things were good and those things were bad. But the older she got the more smudgy the rules became—now she found it hard to define goodness and badness. . . . And happiness, who that saw or thought was happy? and what sort of happiness was it that was unseeing and unthinking?

Worst of all it was to consider life and death in a time when the old lived and the young died, and the facts of life were made hideous and the benefits of death were extolled.

At first her husband had said to her: "The war is getting on your nerves, Miriam," and she had answered back passionately: "Why shouldn't it get on my nerves? I'd be ashamed if it didn't."

But, as time passed, it began to seem normal that men should die like that. After three years of war, the freshness of pity, the shock of horror, were gone. People could not feel any more even if they wanted to, and so they began to call themselves stoics. Miriam found that her plans, loves, hopes, prejudices, were still much as they had always been. She even found that she was able to turn from news of the war to news of the latest fashions—she did so with conscious irony, but yet not without interest.

Sometimes they went so far as to discuss what they would do when the war was over. "In five years' time," said Dr. Hugo, "my endowment policy falls due. How shall we use it? . . . I have an idea. What about another trip to Europe?"

It had seemed to Miriam a delightful plan, except that, as she said, they would never now see the old Europe any more.

Still, it was something to look forward to; only, unfortunately, so far away. Often Miriam wished, with impatience, that the time for going were there already, that the five waiting years were over. Then she would remember that she was forty, and that in five years she would be forty-five; that the time had arrived when she dared no longer anticipate.

Forty-five. And one said it quickly as if it were merely a number. As if it had nothing but a numerical significance. As if it did not mean the death of youth and the decay of life. As if every moment in every day of all the years were not a moment lost for ever. . . . Oh, no, no. Let not the years pass too quickly. Stand still, Time, stand still.

A coldness would fall on Miriam's heart. She was forty, dared not look years ahead, must treasure each day as it came, draw it out, reckon with it.

But then she would forget. She would forget that she was forty and must not let the moments slip. She would be in the grip of the war again—youth, age, it did not matter, it was all the same; every one was dying.

Weeks would pass, and suddenly she would remember again that she was forty. . . . The days were hurrying on. April already. Only a thought ago it had been March. She would be forty-one before she had time to realise that she was running past forty. With her old childhood's tendency to nurse a pain, Miriam began now to consider herself forty-one. How far away—how youthful—was thirty-nine. But in another few years forty-one would be youthful.

She had noticed it with Aunt Laura. Aunt Laura was fifty-nine, but she did not speak of herself as old or even elderly. Only lately she had begun to admit that she was middle-aged. Between forty and fifty she had belonged to no specific period of age at all. She could not call herself young, would not call herself middle-aged. But now she considered people under fifty youthful. How often had Miriam heard her say: "So-and-so old! But, my dear Miriam, she can't be more than about my own age!"

And she said it quite innocently, without introspection. She no longer felt that fifty-nine was old. She certainly did not feel old herself, although she had now reached an age when it was not necessary any more to be thought young. That was the hateful part of it to Miriam—this matter of seeming young. According as she dressed so or dressed so, acted this way or acted that way, she might be taken to be younger or older. It was as if they could not bear to part—youth and she. Youth clung to her, and she clung to youth. A painracked love. Not sweet love, but bitter love. Not sweet youth, but bitter, bitter youth—dying youth.

Sometimes she wished that she were done with it—were comfortably old, no need to demand or struggle or hope any longer. What a vampire was Hope, drinking the blood of one's heart! But when one was old there was nothing to hope for, and that was better. Without hope there was peace.

§ 2

Miriam looked at the people she knew, wondered if behind each closed face lay thoughts like hers. "We are getting old, Conrad," she said to her husband.

"Yes, that is so," he admitted. "But it's a privilege these days, isn't it? Some people will never have the chance any more."

Miriam was shocked by her own littleness. She remembered how eighteen years ago she had been pulled up on her career of introspection by the thought of the starving Kaffirs. There was no sorrow, she had felt then, but physical sorrow—her spiritual yearnings and dissatisfactions, what were they compared with the coarse problem of an empty stomach?

That was eighteen years ago, and in eighteen years she had learnt nothing. To-day young men were dying in millions, and she was sorrowing over her waning youth—her ridiculous, useless youth.

But there it was: one never learnt, one never changed. Her father, at seventy, was still considering the events of two thousand years ago—and in times like these! Martin and Janet were still craving a good time. Susie and Freddie and Carrie were still urging their way among purely white people. She herself was still wondering and searching. The people she had known all her life, they were just as they had ever been. Even the war changed nobody—as long as it changed nobody's circumstances. She had met men returned from the war—they had seen and they had known, but they were not different. A man developed his nature, but he did not change it. . . .

As he approached manhood he took his pose once and for all in the world. "This," he told himself in effect, "is the kind of man I'll be. These are the things I'll like and approve of. My ideals and prejudices will be the following. For this I will work, and for that I will hope. . . ."

Sometimes he took his pose deliberately and sometimes he found it accidentally. And at first it was only a pose, but afterwards it was the man.

§ 3

There was Felix, for instance, aimless and moody, awakening to sex—unconsciously he was seeking his pose in the world. He did not know what he wanted to do or what he wanted to be. Despite his repentant letter to Miriam, he had not changed or improved much. He could not take an interest in his lessons, or settle down to his school-work. At the end of the year he was due to matriculate; and since boys more fortunately placed than he, who aspired to a higher education, generally went away to the boarding-schools in the bigger towns, Felix was the only boy in Adam's Rest of matriculation standard. Nevertheless, he was idling consistently. He never studied, and did an absolute minimum of such written work as would have to undergo inspection.

He laughed at his father when he spoke to him about working harder. His father had a fine right to talk! He treated his mother's suggestions and reprimands with indifference. Janet, who had set her hopes and ambitions on the boy, was in despair. "You might be able to do something with him," she appealed to Miriam. "He listens to you."

Miriam was flattered, and tried to justify Janet's tribute. She would be tactful rather than severe. Felix had had, as he put it, enough lecturing. But he saw past Miriam's politics.

"I know what you think," he said truculently. "You think I'm not working hard enough. Well, I am. You can take it from me, Aunt Miriam, there isn't another person in the history of Adam's Rest has ever worked any harder."

Miriam smiled. "That isn't saying very much."

"It's saying quite enough. Why should I be better than any one else in Adam's Rest?"

"Because you are better."

Felix was pleased at the praise, but would not show it.

"I don't know why you should think so," he grumbled. "It makes it rotten for me having to live up to your opinion. You're never satisfied with what I do. How many chaps, I'd like to know, have got through their matric. in Adam's Rest?"

"Will you?" asked Miriam.

"Of course I will," he asserted confidently.

"I wish I felt as sure about it as you do," said Miriam.

"You understand, don't you? that your going on to college depends on whether you pass your matric. I don't understand myself how it can be done without working."

"But I tell you I am working," persisted Felix. "Why won't you believe me?"

One got no further with him. He spent week-ends at the farm, sat in a room-full of people with a book on his knee, every now and then joining loudly in the conversation, and maintained strenuously that he was studying. He glanced at his Latin grammar in between sets of tennis, and vowed that he never had a book out of his hands. He devoted himself to the work he liked best —to English and history—and flattered himself that no man could be equally good in everything, and that as long as he scraped through in maths. the literary subjects would pull him up on his aggregate. That was good policy, he assured everybody.

Miriam began to trace his father's and mother's character in him. It seemed as if he also had that fatal capacity of being able to justify to himself his inclinations.

And yet, there was something different at bottom, something that pained him. However assertive he might appear to be, he was dissatisfied with himself. Miriam caught, every now and then, a lonely, unhappy look in his eyes; a look that worried her, and, as always, made her want to do things for him.

CHAPTER III

§ 1

THE year 1917 wore on. Within a month Felix was due to sit for his examination. But now he seemed to be working less than ever. He spent his evenings playing billiards at the Empire Hotel, and his afternoons sitting on Freddie Croft's shop-counter, talking to Freddie's assistant, Maudie Lowe.

When Miriam heard about this new phase, she was unbearably indignant.

"Do you think," she asked him with cold fury, "it's right of you to waste your time talking to coloured girls?"

"Aren't you," Felix reproved her with mild and unctuous charitableness, "rather hard on the poor girl? First of all, she doesn't look coloured. She's fairer than I am. And, second of all, she's just about a sixteenth coloured. Old Mrs. Croft isn't half and half—she's only about a quarter black. And Mr. Croft being white, that makes Mrs. Lowe only an eighth black, and Maudie, having a white father, too, only a sixteenth. That's simple arithmetic."

"I don't want to listen to your impertinent arguments," said Miriam, at red-hot anger now.

"They're not impertinent," denied Felix.

"And," went on Miriam, "I will not have you associating with Maudie Lowe. I tell you, Felix, I will not. And that's my last word."

Points of rage came into the boy's eyes. "What do you mean 'associating'? I've known and spoken to Maudie all my life, and no one has ever said anything about it. Why shouldn't I now?"

A remnant of caution restrained Miriam. Was it wise to make Maudie too significant? Felix was at a dangerous and rebellious age. And he would be out of Adam's Rest in a few months' time.

"We don't want you to fail your exam.," she said more calmly. "Look out for that, Felix. Your future depends on it."

He muttered under his breath.

Miriam caught a word.

"What were you saying, Felix?" she demanded.

"Nothing."

"That isn't true. I heard you use the word 'bully.' "

"Well," he said, with a red, defiant face, "your offer to send me to college gives you the right to bully me, and I don't want to be bullied by everybody. I have to stand father and mother, and that's enough."

"I see," said Miriam. She felt weak and impotent before the cumulative force of the boy's ingratitude. Her face paled. She could hardly speak. "I give you up, Felix. I don't know what to do any more. I have tried my best, but it seems useless."

He looked at her in silence for a moment, rose from his seat, and stood uncertainly before her. Then, suddenly, he put his face against hers. "Forgive me, Aunt Miriam. I don't mean these rotten things I say. Don't think I'm an ungrateful swine. I would do anything in the world for you."

She had heard the same words before. Emery Maytham had said them—how far away he seemed, she hardly thought of him now. And the words had moved her then. But how pale, how small, had been that old emotion before this. Miriam knew that never had she loved, or would she love, any one as much as she loved this boy.

§ 2

For a week Felix worked. He got up at six o'clock in the morning, and worked before going to school. He worked every night till midnight. He laid his labour as a tribute of penitence at Miriam's feet.

But as suddenly as the impulse had started to life in him, so suddenly it died. It had not been a studious impulse, but an emotional impulse. Now he told himself that he would certainly get through, and that to addle his brain before the exam. would do more harm than good. It was better, he informed his restless conscience, to lead a normal, unworried life. In other words, it was better to play tennis and billiards and to lounge in Freddie Croft's shop.

What he did not admit to himself was that the thought of Maudie Lowe lured him to that shop. There was something about Maudie's yellow eyes and thin red lips that fascinated him. Sometimes he felt that he hated Maudie, but he could not help thinking about her, and wanting to go and see her.

He hardly spoke to her when he was in the shop, but his eyes followed all her movements, and she knew it. Maudie, although she was only fifteen, was thoroughly alive to her womanhood, conscious of every effect she made on Felix or any other man. She was particularly proud to be taken notice of by Felix, not only on personal grounds, but because his family "kept themselves proud." There was a good deal of her mother in Maudie Lowe.

Miriam heard that Felix was again spending his afternoons at Freddie Croft's shop. If she had not heard, she would have known by that subtle irony in Carrie's eyes, whenever she met her. Less than any one in Adam's Rest Carrie changed. She was now a grandmother, for each of her daughters who had married diggers now had a baby, but a strange, vital force still electrified her thin body; and her eyes held their indefinable malignancy—a malignancy which had never been expressed in direct action—of thirty years ago.

It amused and gratified Carrie beyond words that Miriam's favourite nephew was distressing Miriam by being interested in her daughter.

It was not, of course, a thing she could discuss with Miriam, but she very politely asked Miriam how Felix was getting on with his work. "We're all of us proud of Felix in Adam's Rest," she said, and there was the merest proprietary suggestion in her voice.

Miriam acknowledged the compliment to Felix with a coldness she could not disguise. What fate, she asked herself bitterly, had decreed that the life of this wretched coloured family should be interwoven with her life? For forty years she had known them and seen them almost daily. She had gone to school with them, and they had taunted her with her aunt's misfortune. It was due to Freddie's attempted kiss that she had been sent away to boarding-school. In her girlhood their baleful presence had hindered her participation in the little gaieties of Adam's Rest. They had envied her her happy marriage, and had sneered at her vanishing youth. They had triumphed over her in the matter of Emery Maytham—that had been the supreme triumph! . . . And then it had begun all over again. . . . The grandchildren of Mr. Lincoln and the grandchildren of Mrs. Croft were going to school together; and this nameless child of Carrie and her ruffianly soldier, this Maudie Lowe—she was the instrument chosen to turn askew the life of the being dearest to her.

Miriam felt indeed, as she had said to Felix, that she could do no more, as if everything were useless. They were all in the grip of something stronger than themselves.

§ 3

Felix idled up to the day before the examination. And then it was as if he had awakened from a long sleep. Suddenly he realised all the examination meant to him—his whole life. They had all impressed that on him, had exaggerated its importance to spur him on. If he passed, it meant college, a profession, the chance of a career. If he failed, it meant humiliation and submersion. He would not get another chance if he failed, he would not ask for it, he would not want it.

In an agony of desperation he threw himself into his books. Here and here and here were things he did not know. He felt as if, against time, he were burrowing for lost treasure. He stuffed facts into his mind as if he were filling a knapsack with gold pieces. They were indeed, he saw at this last moment, gold pieces with which he might purchase his future. He could not gather knowledge quickly enough. But now it slipped through his mind like treasure through clumsy, too-eager fingers.

At twelve o'clock that night he was still working. His mother came out in her old dressing-gown and worn-down slippers, her eyelids heavy, her hair in a plait, and begged him to go to bed and rest. He looked at her feverishly. His face was flushed and perspiring. It was a hot, sultry night in December, and he sat hunched over his little deal table, wearing only an open shirt and a pair of trousers. The room in the lamplight looked dingy and faded. Janet had thought it a pretty room fifteen years ago. River insects and mosquitoes were circling endlessly round the lamp. The table was littered with moths who had fluttered their lives away at their altar of flame.

Felix brushed aside his mother's remonstrances. "I'm perfectly fresh. I could go on till to-morrow morning and not feel tired."

"But the first subject is English. Your English is all right, isn't it?"

"Yes, my English is all right. But there are so many things that aren't. I can't afford to waste a minute."

Janet refrained from mentioning the many minutes he had already wasted, and he himself was too absorbed to feel any irony in his words.

"How much longer will you stay up?" she asked.

"Another hour or so. I'm just polishing off some Latin verbs." . . . There was a little frown between his eyebrows. "Please, mother!"

He did not say the rest of what she understood. "Please, mother. Leave me alone."

She sighed. "Will you have something to eat? Shall I give you a cup of milk?"

He shook his head impatiently.

Janet looked at her son with wistful eyes. She was not an introspective woman, but she felt, all at once, something she could not define—the futility of her motherhood. Felix did not need her. She could do nothing for him, or with him. She mattered so little in his scheme of existence that she might as well be dead. It was not that, in his own way, he did not love her. It was simply that she had completed her task as far as he was concerned. She had brought him into the world, had nourished and tended his youth, and now here he was, on the threshold of manhood, an individual in his own right. How often had he not said: "I want to go out into the world." It was the idle expression of every growing boy. But it was true. It was the voicing of an instinct. Felix really wanted to go out into the world—in other words, he wanted to leave home, to put an end to this business of active parentage on the part of these two life-worn, middle-aged people. While the old still thought the bonds held, the young had broken away. But one day the bonds would be joined together again. They would be joined by Pity. The pity of the old for the young because they were so young; the pity of the young for the old because they were so old. . . .

Janet stood at the door and watched Felix as he bent over his books again.

"Good-night, Felix," she said.

He looked up, and saw her standing there—really saw her for a moment.

"Poor old mother," he said.

Tears came into Janet's eyes. She thought suddenly of the whole hard struggle of her life—even its few hectic patches of gaiety seemed pathetic now—she wanted to speak, to make him understand. But, instead, she smiled tremulously. What, after all, was there to say?

She closed his door gently, and went back to bed.

§ 4

In the little class-room next morning, with the old Church of England minister facing him as commissioner, Felix considered his examination paper. He had not gone to bed before three o'clock in the morning, and he was rather tired. Not exactly tired, but, as he expressed it to himself, a bit muzzy. His questions loomed before him, vague and big, with blurred, hazy edges, as if they were a test for short-sight.

Nevertheless, on reviewing his work at the end of the day, he reckoned that he had done his set-work fairly well, even if he had not quite reached his usual standard with his essay. On the whole, he was satisfied.

The week wore on. Now Felix could not tear himself away from his books. Every night he worked till two or three o'clock, and every morning he sat down to his questions full of last-moment information, a little —but not very—tired.

The end of the week found him white and exhausted —he had actually grown thin during the week—but very hopeful.

"I'm sorry for you, Aunt Miriam," he said cheerfully to her a few days later.

"Why?"

"A misfortune has happened to you."

"A misfortune?"

"Yes. You are about to lose a lot of money. I'm going to pass that exam. and be a liability on you for years and years and years."

It was his way of acknowledging his appreciation of Miriam's interest in his future.

CHAPTER IV

§ I

Well, it was all behind him. Felix felt free. Before the examination, although he had seemed indifferent, the thought of his ordeal had lain like a hand of ice on his conscience. Now it was done. However it was done, it was over. The results would not be out for six weeks or more. College would not begin till March. Here was real holiday.

He became again the Felix of a year or two ago whom all the people in Adam's Rest had loved. Once more he was every one's keen and interested friend. He devoted himself to his family. He played tennis with Isabel, and whitewashed Miriam's rondavels, and repaired his mother's fowl-run, and went swimming with his brothers. This Claude and Stanley felt to be a great condescension on his part. For lately Felix had seemed to prefer going by himself or with grown-up men. And why not? He would be seventeen in a month, wore long trousers, did not go barefoot any more, as they did, would be a college-man instead of a schoolboy in eight or nine weeks. It was decent of him to overlook these distinctions, and they followed him about worshipfully.

Then he rode over to Baboon's Gully and offered to help his father with his digging. "You take a holiday, father, and I'll look after the Kaffirs."

Martin shook his head.

"Yes, go on, do, father. I'll like being here."

Martin protested weakly.

"Just for a week or two," insinuated Felix. "I'm eating my head off with boredom at Adam's Rest."

So Felix took his father's place at Baboon's Gully, and Martin went to Adam's Rest, and told every one there about the son he had. As if they had not all known Felix for seventeen years! "I don't believe there's another boy in the world like mine," he said. "I'm a poor man, and I've never had any luck in my life, and people look down on a poor, unlucky man; but to Felix—to Felix I'm a duke and a millionaire. He knows what I've done for him—he honours his father."

Martin would go on to discuss Felix's future college career. "Whatever Felix wants to do, he'll be able to do it. He could take up any profession he liked, and make a success of it. He's got a brain, that boy."

He would describe Felix "bossing up" the Kaffirs. "You should see how they listen to him. He makes them work, I can tell you. And yet, at the same time, they would do anything for him. It's marvellous, the way he's got with people."

His listeners would murmur bored politenesses. Martin would be encouraged to follow a new train of boasting.

"You'd never think, to look at him—would you now?—that he was only seventeen. Nearly six feet in height, and not a weed either. That's where he takes after my family. I'm the smallest of five brothers."

Martin would go on to trace the characteristics which Felix had inherited from the Websters. He would presently find himself left alone, and he would stroll up and down The Street aimlessly. There were few things in the world, except the contemplation of his bad luck and successful paternity, that interested Martin. The war, perhaps. But chiefly from the point of view of how, under such and such circumstances, he, Martin, would have directed certain strategical operations. He still had an invincible faith in himself; felt that he had been denied magnificent achievement only by his peculiar and persistent bad fortune, and by the sacrifices he had made for his family. He was a corpulent man now of nearly fifty, bald, with a heavy gait. Since the war he had taken to wearing a small moustache. His eyes, shaped for laughing, had pouches beneath them, his clefted chin surmounted another bigger chin. On the rare occasions when he wore a collar, the flesh at the back of his head rolled a little over the edge of it. His hands were heavy and coarse. Yet he still had traces of good looks, his nose and mouth were as fine as ever, his smile rather attractive, and when he was properly dressed, he looked very prosperous, and, with his forehead intellectually enlarged by his baldness, even a little distinguished.

On such occasions Janet regarded him admiringly.

"All right, eh?" he would suggest, acknowledging the approval in her eyes.

"Yes, quite all right," she would respond.

§ 2

Actually at the end of his first week at Baboon's Gully, Felix brought home a diamond. Now Martin could not bear to stay away from his diggings any longer. He sold the diamond for fifty pounds, and gave ten pounds to Felix. "Keep that for pocket-money at college," he said. "You've worked for it."

And he told himself that Felix was always a lucky boy. "Perhaps he has brought me luck, too," he thought.

But no other diamond came along to support Martin's hope, and by the end of another week Felix had gone home, and Martin was pursuing his old line of complaint. "As soon as I turn up, the luck goes."

Dr. Hugo began discussing with Felix the course he ought to take at college. Felix was all eagerness and gratitude. "I won't loaf, I promise you. I'll try for a bursary so that you might be saved some of the expense. You're too decent to me."

The weeks slipped past. One Saturday afternoon Felix came out as usual to the farm. He had ridden over on the family bicycle, which had been Aunt Laura's present to them last Christmas. He wore flannels, and carried his racquet. But it was a hot day, and still early in the afternoon, and no one had yet arrived to play. Only Miriam was in the house, reading.

"Hallo, Aunt Miriam," said Felix.

"Hallo, Felix," Miriam returned the greeting, with a little smile that no one evoked from her except Felix. "You're early."

"Am I? Are we the only two so far? Well, let's have a game then, you and I."

"Too hot," refused Miriam. "What a thing it is to be young! You've just done a long bicycle ride, and here you are, ready to play tennis on top of it—in this weather!"

Felix took a book from the bookshelf, and sat down on a low chair.

Presently Miriam raised her eyes towards him. "Well," she said, "only a few more weeks, and you won't be coming here for week-ends any longer."

But Felix was deep in his book, and did not answer. His face was flushed from his ride, his golden-brown hair clung damply to his forehead, his shirt was open around his strong, brown, vigorous young neck. His long, white-clad legs were stretched before him. He was Youth. "How handsome he is!" thought Miriam. She forgot that he had not acknowledged her remark.

After a while he looked up.

"By the way," he said, "I've failed, you know."

Miriam's eyes were on him, uncomprehendingly.

"Failed," he repeated, but his lips were a little stiff. "The matric."

It seemed to Miriam that he could not mean what he appeared to mean. For why should he be sitting there so calmly in his tennis clothes, with a book in his hand, if he knew that he had not passed? Surely they had impressed the importance of the thing sufficiently on him. Did he really not care? "By the way," he had begun casually. "By the way. . . ."

"Why don't you say something?" he demanded sharply with a crack in his voice. "I've failed. F-a-i-l-e-d," he spelt the word out with a sneer. "You always warned me I would. And now I've done it."

"When did you hear?" asked Miriam.

"This morning. The lists are out. I'm not there."

He began whistling jauntily. Miriam stared at him, speechlessly. She did not know what to say.

He threw his book down suddenly, and sprang up from his chair. "Well, I'd better be going," he said, and walked quickly out of the house.

Miriam remained sitting on her chair, her thoughts a confusion in which there predominated, for the moment, an angry recollection of how Felix had wasted his time. Then pity for the boy's pathetic bravado overrode her other emotions. To carry it off like that!

She got up, and followed him into the garden. His bicycle, which had been leaning against the verandah rails, was gone. She went as far as the gate. Down the road she saw the decreasing shape of a white-clad figure on a bicycle.

§ 3

Until that evening Miriam saw none of the family. Then Dr. Hugo brought Janet and Isabel out with his car.

"Well, have you heard?" said Janet.

"Yes. He was here at about three o'clock."

"I can't believe it," cried Janet. "There must be some mistake. Felix is so clever. He seemed to know things almost without studying. His name must have been left out by accident. He couldn't have failed."

"What's the use of trying to deceive yourself, Janet?" Miriam said impatiently. "You know he's failed. Unfortunately, he had the same idea about himself as you have—that he could know things without studying. He never worked, and this is the natural result."

She had been sympathising with Felix before Janet came, but Janet's maternal expostulations irritated her.

Janet sat down bulkily on a chair. She was flushed with the heat, and looked very depressed. She had put all her expectations on Felix. His failure was something besides the mere failure of a school-examination, the jeopardising of his future. It was an assault on Janet's only bulwark against the world—her pride in her children.

"And now what's going to happen?" She looked appealingly at Dr. Hugo. Her son's fate was in his hands. Dr. Hugo had told Felix before the examination that if he failed he would not give him another chance, that he did not propose to send him to college if he would not work. Had he, Janet wondered now, only been trying to frighten Felix into studying, or had he meant his words literally?

Conrad met Miriam's eyes. He spoke after a moment's deliberation.

"Don't worry, Janet. The end of the world hasn't come yet. We'll see what can be done. You stay here to-night. We'll talk it over again to-morrow morning."

Janet's look of appeal changed to one of gratitude. Immediately she felt comforted. All her optimism was alive again. What was it, really, to fail an exam.? He'd have to try again, that was all.

That night it was only Miriam, in the old farmhouse, who was unhappy. Her conscience was troubling her. Poor Felix, no doubt he had deserved what had happened. But he had been brave in failure. She wished she had not let him go out of the house without a word to cheer him. She could hardly bear to wait until the morrow that she might make up for her hardness of to-day. All his life Felix had had the power over people to make them want to do things for him.

CHAPTER V

§ 1

But when the next day came, the opportunity to do things for Felix was lacking. Dr. Hugo brought Janet back to Adam's Rest at about midday. The first person she saw on arriving home was Claude. "Where's Felix?" she asked.

"I don't know," answered Claude. "He's out somewhere, I suppose."

"What time did he go?"

"Pretty early. He wasn't here when I went swimming, because I looked for him. I wanted him to come along."

"I expect he's feeling fed-up about having failed," put in Stanley, "and doesn't want to see any of us till he gets over it."

"That's probably so," said Dr. Hugo.

But by evening Felix had not yet returned, and Janet began to get uneasy. She went to his room and looked about her in a worried, unsettled frame of mind, as if the walls could tell her where her son was. She fingered the things on his dressing-table with the old mottled mirror. Presently it struck her that his brush and comb were gone. Nor was his tooth-brush, as usual, in the chipped shaving-mug on the wash-stand. Nor, she discovered in an agony, was his best suit behind the faded cretonne curtain that served him instead of a wardrobe. . . .

Dr. Hugo had, by this time, returned to the farm, and Martin was at Baboon's Gully. He found it nowadays too tiring to ride the twenty miles to Adam's Rest on horseback; and so, when he could get no other conveyance, he had, perforce, to spend his week-ends at the diggings.

Janet took the two younger boys with her, and hurried across to her father.

She found Mr. Lincoln and Aunt Laura at their cold Sunday supper. Aunt Laura was just cutting the bread. As usual in summer, little river insects were hovering round the lamp, but everything on the table was neat and delicate. Mr. Lincoln was quite white now, and his thin pallor gave him a look of almost exquisite cleanness. Aunt Laura, her unspoilt profile towards the door, still carried traces of her youthful good looks. There was, over the whole picture, an air of that contentment which is verging on resignation.

They looked up as Janet burst into the room.

"Felix is gone," said Janet.

"Gone? Where to?" asked Aunt Laura.

"I don't know," said Janet. "I only know he's gone. Gone altogether. His brush and comb and tooth-brush aren't there, and he's taken his best suit and all his other little things."

She sat down on the sofa, and broke into a passion of tears. "He was too proud—too proud. He couldn't stand failure."

"Do you think he might have left by train?" asked Mr. Lincoln. "Had he any money?"

"The ten pounds Martin gave him for finding that diamond. I remembered it as I was coming across."

"Well, Janet, it's no use distressing yourself," said Mr. Lincoln. "We had better go over to the station and find out from the station-master what really happened—whether he took a train, or not. Will you come, too, Laura? Or would you like to remain here with the boys?"

"No. I'll come. But why didn't you make inquiries earlier in the day, Janet?"

"I thought—if he came back—he would be angry with me for making a fool of him. Asking people where he was. Letting them see I was frightened."

"Well, don't let's waste time now," said Mr. Lincoln.

They left their supper standing, and hurried to the station. Claude and Stanley were not altogether unpleasantly excited. That was a man—Felix! To run away! How often had they wanted to run away themselves and had not dared. They envied Felix.

The station-master was sitting on the verandah of the station-house when they arrived. "Hallo, what's all this?" he said, eyeing the perturbed group.

"Did Felix leave by this morning's train?" asked Mr. Lincoln.

"Yes. Didn't you know? He took a ticket to the next station. Said he was going to spend the day with friends. It's a shame the examiners didn't pass him—a clever boy like that. It ought to be seen into. I shouldn't be surprised if there wasn't a mistake somewhere."

Mr. Lincoln cut him short.

"Well, he hasn't come back yet, and we are uneasy.

Could you telephone to Bosmanshoop and find out if they know anything about him?"

"Certainly," said the station-master. He came back in a few minutes with a puzzled face. "They say a young fellow got off there, took a ticket to Cape Town, and went straight on with the same train. It struck them as a bit funny."

"I knew it," said Janet. "I felt at once that something was wrong. Oh, what can we do now? Is there some way of stopping him? Can't we wire—he's under age—make him come back?"

"No. No. Wait a bit, Janet," said her father. "Don't lose control of yourself. You can't make him come back except by putting the thing into the hands of the police. You don't want to do that, do you?"

"I didn't think. Not the police. Felix would never forgive me."

"You could wire to Felix himself, of course, somewhere along the line. But I doubt if that would be any use."

"It wouldn't," said Janet. "I know Felix. It wouldn't. Nothing would. He's not like other boys."

She spoke with a certain melancholy pride in her son's peculiar temperament.

"But what," she worried, "will he do when he gets to Cape Town? He only had ten pounds, and he had to buy his ticket out of that."

"He'll write to us from Cape Town," said Mr. Lincoln. "I'm sure he will. He'll know we're anxious, and he's a good boy at heart. Now, come back, Janet, and have something to eat with us—you haven't had supper, have you? And cheer up. There's nothing more to be done. We must wait, that's all."

§ 2

They waited for over a week, and then two letters from Felix arrived at Adam's Rest—one was to his mother, and one was to Miriam.

> "DEAR MOTHER,"—he wrote,—"I expect you must be uneasy about me, and I'm sorry I couldn't write before. The reason why I couldn't write before is because I wanted to have some news to tell you; and the news is that I am as good as passed for the Flying Corps. What do you think of that? Of course, I had to lie about my age, and so forth, but everything is all right now. Aren't you proud of me being in the Flying Corps? I know father will be. He always wished he could go to the Front, or had a son old enough to go.
>
> "I'm sorry I failed my matric. and all that, but I'll try and make up for it now.
>
> "Your loving son,
>
> "FELIX.
>
> "P.S.—Don't worry about me. Cheerio!"

The letter he wrote to Miriam was rather different. He had always found it easier to confide in his aunt—to confide in anybody—than in his mother. There was something about one's parents—most fellows, he had found, were emotionally shy of their parents . . . one couldn't speak to them intimately, one held oneself in check before them.

"Dear Aunt Miriam,"—ran his letter to Miriam, —"You don't know how desperate I felt the day I came to tell you I had failed my exam. That's really why I turned up so early; and not to play tennis.

"Although I tried to persuade myself and other people that I would pass, I knew all the time that I was going to fail. When I was sitting there, before the results came out, and talking to you and Uncle Con about college, I kept on thinking to myself 'A fine hope you've got of college!'

"I know that I deserved to fail. I slacked away that whole last year. I can't tell you what was the matter with me—I feel now as if I had been under a kind of evil spell. I don't say this for an excuse. As you told me once or twice: 'Temptation comes from within, not from without.' Which refers to evil spells too, doesn't it? But, anyway, the end of it all was that I failed.

"I suppose if I'd been a really decent character I'd have stuck it out, and told myself that I'd had my lesson, and asked you for another chance, and tried the exam. again. But I couldn't do it. I thought it all over before the results came out, and I decided that if I failed, I must redeem myself in some other way. And now here I am.

"I wrote and told mother that I supposed she and father would be delighted that I had got into the Flying Corps. Father particularly, because he always talked so much about wanting to be in the war. But

I know, of course, that they won't be pleased really. They'll think of the risk and all the rest of it. So please buck them up a bit.

"I hope you'll forgive me for disgracing myself and disappointing you all by failing, and for going away like this. You know how grateful I am to you and Uncle Con for all you've done, and all you wanted to do. I have nothing else to tell you now, but I'll write again.

"Yours,
"FELIX."

Miriam handed the letter silently to her husband.

When he had finished it, she said in a low, hard voice: "If I had behaved differently the day he came to tell me he had failed, I could have prevented him from going."

"I don't think so," said Dr. Hugo. "You see, he says here he had made up his mind before the results came out."

"Then why did he come to me? There was something he wanted me to give him—help, sympathy—and I failed him."

Dr. Hugo put his arm around his wife. "You always chastise yourself unnecessarily," he said. "In the old days you would have been one of those people who wore hair-shirts. You can't blame yourself because Felix didn't pass. And what he really deserved for failing was censure, not sympathy. In any case, why should you speak as if this were the end of him? Look how many men voluntarily go to the Front, without other people worrying because they didn't prevent them, and how distinguished they consider it to be to be picked for the Flying Corps. I assure you they don't feel suicidal about it. Nor does Felix. He's probably having the time of his life. Come along. Cheer up. Be a sensible little woman now."

Miriam shook her head. "I'd give anything to have him back in Adam's Rest."

"And if you did," said Dr. Hugo. "What then?"

Miriam was silent. Who could do anything for Felix except Felix himself? When she spoke, it was in a heavy voice. "You may be right. But I only know that if anything happens to Felix, I'll never forgive myself. Never."

CHAPTER VI

§ 1

FELIX's flight and enlistment proved a matter of greater interest to Adam's Rest than the whole course and conduct of the war. He could not have thought of a more dramatic way of re-establishing himself. "Webster is right about that boy of his," the men said. "But where he got him from is the surprising thing."

Martin himself felt an ache at his heart when he pictured Felix in uniform—a fighting man. Only yesterday, it seemed, Felix was running along at his side in his little sailor-suit, asking him if he had found any diamonds. He was only seventeen now. Too young. Too young.

But he could not resist the temptation of boasting about him. "It's the old fighting blood coming out in Felix," he said. "I was the same in my time. When the Boer War was on, I couldn't rest. I had to go. I threw up my billet, and that was the end of me. . . . To-day I'm here. Well, I hope Felix is luckier."

As the weeks went on, he could not help taking a little of Felix's credit to himself. He began to feel a kind of proprietorial interest in the war. "It's all very well your talking, Thompson," he would say, "but what have you done for your country? It's different with me. I've sent my son." (That was how he put it these days: "I've sent my son.") "I'd have gone myself if I could have, but I'm too old; and since that operation I had for gall-stones, I'm not the man I was either. Still, my son has gone instead. So I've got my stake in the war, and it gives me the right to speak."

He used his right extensively. Not only did he pronounce his opinions exhaustively about the war and the Germans, but every time Janet sent him on a letter from Felix, he read it aloud from beginning to end in the bar of Baboon's Gully. The diggers were all interested in what Felix had to say—even those who might have gone to fight and had not, felt that the patriotic status of Baboon's Gully had been raised because Webster's son had got into the Flying Corps. But they resented subconsciously the satisfaction he derived from boasting about his son. "There he goes off again," they would say.

One person, however, refused to listen to Martin when he spoke about Felix, and that was Janet. During the last few years Janet had changed—or, rather, she had developed harshly in certain directions. She was graver, harder. Now it seemed to her the culmination of a life of bitterness that Felix should have failed his examination and gone to the Front. She blamed Martin for it. "If you had been able to afford to send him away to a proper school like the other boys, he would not have failed," she maintained. "But what chance had he with the kind of teaching he got here? It wasn't fair on him, and I don't blame him for anything. I blame you. . . . For Heaven's sake, Martin, don't stand there and tell me Felix is doing his bit. What business has a boy of seventeen to be fighting in a war like this?

. . . Leave me alone, won't you? Leave me alone. I want to be by myself."

She would look at him with a coldness in the blue eyes that once had melted at sight of him. Lately she felt that she hated Martin.

But as the months passed by, and the letters they received from Felix were consistently cheerful, her anxiety lost its edge. She went on with her ordinary life—with the eking out of a narrow existence. Her natural habit of hope revived in her. Felix would not be sent to the battle-zone for a long time yet—the war could not go on much longer—before they knew where they were, he would be back, taller, handsomer, manlier than ever. How proud they would all be of him!

§ 2

But the war had other effects in Adam's Rest. In Europe white people were finding a whole continent too small to contain all of them, and in Africa the Kaffirs suffered for it. Throughout Adam's Rest and its surroundings, there were probably not three Kaffirs who had independent means of existence, or, indeed, anything beyond their small weekly wage; and that they only had on the day it was paid. When the people who employed them needed their services very badly, they paid the Kaffirs a pound a week—sometimes a shilling or two more. When they needed their services less badly, they paid them fifteen shillings, ten shillings, even seven or eight shillings a week; and on this whole families were maintained. But when they needed their services not at all, there was no help for the Kaffirs anywhere, and they had to starve. If they did not die of hunger, they died, hardly less definitely, through hunger.

And these things being so, and the cost of goods going up continually, and Freddie Croft depending almost entirely on his Kaffir trade, business was in a bad way with Freddie. The Kaffirs could not afford to pay the prices he asked, and he could not afford to ask less if he wanted to show any profit. Freddie Croft, of course, did not import direct. He bought from wholesale houses in the bigger towns, and they very often charged him more than the retail prices obtaining in the same towns, because in those days the man who had the goods walked with a stiff spine and sneered at the man who merely had the money. Not that Freddie Croft had too much money. That was the trouble. If he could not sell his stock, he could not meet his bills. Apart from everything, he had to contend against the ruinous competition of a small village. And, in the end, he had to sell his goods under cost (and even then make bad debts), and to hope that the war would be over soon, and that everything would be accessible again, and that prices would come down, and that he would be able profitably to replace his vanishing stock.

But the war was not, apparently, nearing its conclusion, and goods were not, by any means, getting cheaper. On the contrary, they were getting dearer. Freddie's shelves were almost empty, and still he had bills to meet. Henry, who understood how to save, but not how to spend, was grumbling at the way his money was going, and asking Freddie rude and awkward elementary questions on the subject of profit and loss. Almost every time Henry asked a question, he had to part with some more money. "If you don't give it to me," Freddie told him coldly, "you'll lose what's in the business already. It don't make any difference to me. It's not my money that was put in. I'd just as soon go back to a job myself—I'm fed up with working for nothing. . . . Well, I'm telling you: It's your own look-out."

Nowadays Henry could hardly see Freddie without wanting to strike him.

Eventually the time came when Henry had neither the money nor (what was now of no consequence at all) the inclination to support the business any longer. And that which every one had naturally prophesied from the beginning came to pass. The firm of F. Croft & Co. suspended payment. . . .

Henry told Freddie furiously that it all came of coloured people mixing up with white people. And Freddie retorted, though not exactly in those temperate words, that the point was not that coloured people had mixed up with white people, but that coloured people had mixed up with Kaffirs. It was the inevitable rejoinder, but Henry was not in a mood to appreciate repartee. Under almost the same circumstances as he had assaulted Freddie over a score of years ago, he threw himself on him now. But this time there were no spectators to separate them. The brothers were alone in the shop which had betrayed them, among the empty shelves and the mocking counters, with the bitterness of their lost hopes.

In the twenty years and more that had passed since that struggle outside the bar when Freddie had ushered the New Year in by calling Henry Kaffir, Freddie had grown fat and soft, but Henry had grown wrinkled and hard. He had no trouble with Freddie at all. He battered him against walls, hammered him into the dust of the floor; and, when the fight was over, Freddie was taken to the hospital, and Henry was taken to the jail.

It was an episode that, in combination with the bankruptcy, considerably lowered the Croft prestige in Adam's Rest. Freddie's children were removed from school, and went to live with their mother at the home of their grandparents, still bijwoners on Dr. Hugo's farm. Susie's respectfulness took on a new tinge of humility, and old Mrs. Croft was more than ever assiduous and ingratiating.

Only Carrie, although she was a direct sufferer through the bankruptcy, since it meant the loss of Maudie's job and her monthly wage, only Carrie, of all the Crofts, kept a stiff neck, maintained that mysterious air she had behind her modest front, which seemed to say that she considered herself as good as any one—that is, as good as any white person.

And then, that was not the worst of it for Carrie—the bankruptcy and the fight, and Maudie's loss of a job. The worst of it was Maudie herself. Carrie was having trouble with Maudie. Of all her children, she loved Maudie best, and Maudie was running about too dangerously much with men. Carrie trembled for her love-child.

Alas for Carrie! Despite the lapse of which Maudie was the result, she felt herself so respectable, she had kept herself white for so many years, that now she could not understand where the justice of it all came in. Why could not Life leave her alone?

CHAPTER VII

§ 1

Felix was writing regular and cheerful letters to his people in Adam's Rest. He was now in England, and it was spring-time there, and he was actually learning how to fly, and he was glowing with excitement. Only occasionally his letters to Miriam carried a note of depression. "So many maimed men about. I would rather be killed than maimed."

"That a child of seventeen should be talking of death!" Miriam cried to her husband.

Dr. Hugo smoked his pipe in silence. What was there to say? One could but hope in times like these.

And as the weeks went by uneventfully, hope grew. One began gradually to feel more safe . . . like a little child undressing in a room at night by himself. It is dark outside, and he is frightened to be alone. He takes off his shoes and socks, his outer clothes, looking around him nervously. "If only I could get into bed quickly," he thinks, "and put the blankets over me, I would be safe." . . . Safe from what? He does not define it. He hurries off his shirt and vest with unsteady fingers. "Nearly safe," he tells himself. "Nearly safe now." He puts on his little pyjamas breathlessly, slips into bed. "Safe!" he whispers, and lies there trembling. It is not true that he feels really safe yet; but if only one can get to sleep soon enough, it is almost the same thing as being quite safe. . . .

The weeks were creeping into months. "Perhaps the war will be over," Miriam prayed, "before Felix has finished his training."

And as she prayed, she forgot how others had finished their training long ago—for ever.

§ 2

Miriam was forty-one now, and, sometimes, when she chanced to see herself in the glass as the light fell a certain way, she knew that here was a woman definitely past her first youth. Then she would notice lines and hollows that must have come only lately, for, whatever the light, she had not seen them there before. She could not tell when they had begun to come—it was not like her first gray hair—but there they were.

Yet, at other times, turn her head as she would, she could not see them. Then she thought she looked surprisingly young—perhaps it was ridiculous to say so, but really, scarcely thirty. Despite the weight the war had laid on her heart, she could not, now and then, help a little feeling of wonder and satisfaction when she saw herself bearing the years so easily.

Yet she realised how dependent was her appearance now on thought and care and circumstance. If she wore this, dressed her hair so, sat there, it made all the difference. Twenty years ago she had looked twenty whatever the complementary details; to-day she looked forty—unless she tried to look thirty.

But then days would go past when she hardly saw herself as she stood before the glass to complete her toilet. Then it was as if the reflection before her had no meaning as a face at all, nor did it matter if it had a meaning or not. She no longer asked herself (or, shyly, her husband) whether she looked older or younger than this woman or that woman. In times like these how could one care?

But outwardly life went on in Adam's Rest as usual. People still played tennis and bridge, read novels, talked scandal, had babies, made plans . . . ate and drank and laughed.

As far as one could notice, the only difference the war made in Adam's Rest was that all the women knitted, and that the entertainments and bazaars were now for war purposes.

And yet, as the years passed, there came a little undertone sounding through the talk and laughter, a little quiver running through the whole business of life. For deep down in every heart was a frightened, undefined thought: "So many people dying—millions and millions. And I am alive. Strange that I—just I myself—should be still alive."

It was the feeling of the survivor in a shipwreck—a troubled satisfaction.

Now there was to be a great bazaar in Adam's Rest. All the men had subscribed to it, and all the women were working for it—even Carrie and Susie and Mrs. Croft. They did not come officially to the meetings, but they had their particular share in the preparations. They were given sewing to do—Susie and Carrie made children's overalls and men's pyjamas, and Mrs. Croft made the little bags for the sweets. They gave their labour resentfully, grumbled to one another; yet they could do nothing but acquiesce and smile when one of the Adam's Rest ladies approached them for assistance.

Miriam and Janet were sitting in Miriam's dining-room and sewing for the bazaar. It was a morning in early August and very cold, but a log-fire was flaring upwards (no one used coal in Adam's Rest, it was too expensive to bring there from the Transvaal), and they had just had their eleven o'clock tea. A long delayed mail had only yesterday brought them three letters at once from Felix, and the information in the last one that he still had a long training ahead of him was reflected in the women's peaceful faces.

"The war will be over now before he gets to the Front," Janet was saying. "The Germans are collapsing."

"It seems almost selfish to be so happy about it," mused Miriam, "while others are giving their lives to bring about the end. There will be people whose hearts will break when the war is over because theirs are dead, and others' are not. They will feel it more then than when death was waiting for every one. Their sorrow will be greater when it ceases to be the rule. . . ." She stopped, looking about her. "I can't find the scissors, Janet. Have you got them?"

Janet searched in her work-bag. "No. Perhaps they are under that stuff there."

Miriam turned over the odds and ends of materials littering the table. "I don't see them. Did you notice whether I carried them out with me when I went to make the tea?"

"You may have. Probably they are in the kitchen."

Miriam got up and went to the kitchen. Yes. There they were, on the table. She took them. As she was turning to leave the kitchen, she saw, through the window, a man standing uncertainly at the gate. He looked up, and, seeing her, too, came into the garden.

Miriam went out to meet him. It was the Adam's Rest postmaster.

He spoke quickly.

"Mrs. Hugo," he said, "I came here myself because——"

Miriam held his wavering eyes.

"There is a message at the post-office for Mr. Webster. I went to Dr. Hugo's consulting-room, but he was not there." He finished almost in a whisper. "I—couldn't send the message. I had to bring it."

What he had come to say—it was said now.

Miriam did not know she was speaking. But she uttered a word. "Felix!"

The postmaster put his hand on her arm. "He was killed in a flying accident twelve days ago. The cable has only just come through."

He led her towards the house. Miriam motioned him away. "His mother is here," she said.

"Can you tell her?" asked the postmaster.

Miriam nodded.

She returned to the dining-room as in a dream. She had no words formulated in her mind. She still carried the scissors, and as she walked past the table, she found herself unconsciously lifting a piece of material lying there.

"Well, have you found them?" said Janet, without raising her eyes from her sewing. "I am almost sure now I saw you going out with them towards the kitchen."

Miriam's silence forced her to look up. She sprang from her chair.

"What's the matter, Miriam?" she cried. "Miriam, Miriam! Oh, my God, Miriam, what has happened?"

CHAPTER VIII

§ 1

It seemed to be the end, not only of one life, but of all their lives. It was as if their souls had parted from their bodies. They went on with their ordinary avocations, fulfilled their little duties. Aunt Laura made Janet some black clothes. At first she could not bear to put them on—she cried out in horror when she saw them; but afterwards she wore them like an automaton. The year grew on into hot summer, and Janet in her stuffy black insulted the sunshine like the story of a blight.

Martin was still searching for diamonds at Baboon's Gully. It did not strike him as strange that in such a world as he was living in there were, as ever, people wanting things like diamonds. Despite his tragedy, he would have resented it if people had not wanted diamonds. If he could not dig for diamonds, what else could he do?

It was Dr. Hugo who had motored over to Baboon's Gully to bring Martin the news of his son's death. And of all of them, it was Martin who broke down the most terribly. The unifying principle in his life—his own title to manhood—was gone. Not for nothing did Martin boast about his children. They were (and chiefly Felix) his apology for existence.

He gave way without restraint. "I was always an unlucky man. . . . An unlucky man. I was always an unlucky man!" . . .

Now he could talk of nothing but Felix to every one he met. The stories the diggers had all heard for half a generation—Martin told them over and over again, with added detail and added force. They gave him the respect of the love they had had for Felix, and the tribute of their pity. "Poor Felix," they called him now (Oh, the bitter patronage of the living for the dead!) . . . "Poor Felix!"

And they listened to Martin when he boasted about his boys as they had not done for years. Though Martin did not know it, his soul was still feeding on Felix.

§ 2

But when Martin spoke to Miriam—as he spoke to every one—about Felix, she did not answer him at all. She looked at him—at the pouches below the eyes Nature had shaped for laughing, at his baldness and his corpulency, and she despised him because it was chiefly of his own loss he thought, and not of Felix's loss of everything; because he had pity to spare for himself. She saw him as a man who would one day say: "I gave my son."

§ 3

Miriam was still sewing for the bazaar—for the soldiers who were alive. And as she sewed, she thought of the last time she had seen Felix. He had come in, flushed from his ride, and offered to play tennis with her. He had sat down on a chair—the very chair she was sitting in now—with a book. "By the way," he had opened casually, "by the way, I've failed, you know."

She had sat there, looking at him mutely. "Failed," he had repeated. And still she had said nothing.

"When did you hear?" she had asked him finally. And that was all. She had let him go away like that, without another word. She had followed him too late, and the last she had seen of him—the last she would ever see of him—was that white form on a bicycle, diminishing into the distance.

Now it seemed that it was not Felix who had failed in his examination (that poor little childish affair: had they tried to make that seem important?) but she. It was as if Fate had given her a test, and she had failed it. She could have stopped Felix from going—from losing his life; she had had the chance—and she had not taken it.

And that was the end of it. All that was left to her now of Felix was this biting at her heart.

And yet, what did even her remorse matter? Remorse itself was life.

§ 4

Sometimes Miriam found herself slipping into weak thought. "If it were not true now. If this accident had not happened to Felix. (It was only an accident—not inevitable. It might so easily not have happened!) Then soon he would have been coming back with the other men, and what a coming that would have been! . . . How splendid he would have looked in his uniform, and how they would all have been happy! For days and days he would have sat there telling them things—what he had heard and what he had seen and what he had experienced. . . .

But, of course, they would gradually have returned to normal life. And then one day the subject of that old examination would have cropped up. And they would have laughed at it! Yes, they would have laughed! "Do you remember," they would have said, "the way you loafed the whole year through, and then tried to make up for it by swotting all night during the exam.?" . . . Really rather funny. Unconsciously Miriam smiled here. "Oh, well," she would have disposed of the matter eventually, "you'd better have another try. And then, of course, you must go to college, and see what you want to make of your future." It was hardly worth discussing seriously—a school examination!

For a moment Miriam would find herself quite happy. Then as suddenly as if she had been shot, she would remember. Felix would never come back. . . . A flying accident. . . . There was no Felix now.

A rage would come over her. How they had been cheated of their happiness! They might have been so happy, if only they had been left alone. Why could they not have been left alone? Simply a matter of luck. . . .

The word "luck" brought Martin to her mind. She was getting as bad as he was—thinking about herself. If anybody deserved to suffer, she deserved it. She could have stopped Felix, and she had not done so. How dared she ask for happiness? "Suffer, fool," she told herself. "Suffer!"

CHAPTER IX

§ 1

THE bazaar was a great success. It took place on Armistice Day, and it was followed by a dance the same night. The schoolroom was elaborately decorated with paper peach-blossoms, and pepper branches, and palms, and ferns, and "bunting." "Bunting" took the form of triangular pieces of coloured rags strung across the room.

Carrie Lowe had been asked to assist with the decorations, and she had come to Miriam to borrow some plants. She was excited and voluble. This doing of things—this was life. It was almost casually that she told Miriam a piece of news. She spoke about "poor Frances."

"Why? Has anything happened to Frances?" asked Miriam.

"Haven't you heard?" said Carrie, with a kind of decorous satisfaction in being the bearer of tidings. "Mr. Maytham is very ill. He isn't expected to live."

"I am very sorry to hear that," said Miriam formally, and wondered, as she spoke, that she was not more sorry. He had filled all her thoughts once, and now the news that he was "not expected to live" interested her only quite impersonally, moved her not at all. He had married Susie Croft's daughter, had put himself outside the pale, and her feelings about him had ranged through indifference to contempt and surprise, and back again from surprise and contempt to indifference. She found it hard now to realise him at all.

"Yes," said Carrie. "It's a pity, isn't it?"

She decently sighed, but was really too happy at having been asked to help with the decorations to be able to seem even very sad. Emery Maytham had been not so much a man to Carrie, as a social asset. If he died she lost a social asset, that was all; and she could not feel, at the moment, that such a loss amounted to very much, seeing that here she was, anyhow, working together with the Adam's Rest ladies for the bazaar.

"It will be a bad thing for Frances," she continued. "I don't suppose he will leave her anything either. . . . Well, Mrs. Hugo," she thrust the subject aside, and her voice took a brisk lift to cheerier topics, "the ladies said they'll be very glad if you can loan them your plants. There's a boy outside with a wheelbarrow, and I'll walk next to him and see that he don't harm them. And you'll have them back first thing to-morrow morning."

"Please take them," said Miriam.

Carrie hovered around, anxious to make further conversation. "It'll be a grand affair," she said. "I suppose you won't be going?"

Miriam shook her head.

"I thought, being for the soldiers——" Carrie half-suggested. "Still, if you don't feel like it——" She bustled about efficiently among Miriam's plants. "Well, I must hurry. There's a lot of work to do up at the schoolroom."

She walked away beside her wheelbarrowful of plants with just a little swagger. All the people in

Adam's Rest could see that she was directly concerned with the arrangement of the bazaar.

It was a kind of triumphal procession. The Kaffir, the barrow, the palms, and Carrie.

§ 2

She was at the ball, too, that night, and so was Susie, despite the news about her son-in-law, and also Freddie. They were helping with the refreshments. Even Mrs. Croft was there, superintending the washing-up of plates and glasses.

During the last few years, as Adam's Rest had grown, the Croft family had been rather put on one side. Every one knew them as a relic of the old settler days, when any human being that was white—or even partly white —counted. But to-day the Crofts were not needed any more, and it was difficult for them to wedge themselves into the new social formation.

By ten o'clock all the men were rather drunk. As one of them remarked: "I wouldn't think much of an Englishman who wasn't drunk to-night."

It was the same schoolroom in which, over eighteen years ago, Janet had danced with Martin, defying her world for love of him. The occasion for the dance—a war—was essentially the same also, but to-day Janet would have found it hard even to remember the ardour that had electrified her then. Many things had changed since that last dance. Civilisation, travelling by motor-car, and no longer by Cape cart, had advanced in Adam's Rest. Nearly all the men wore dress-suits at the dance to-night, and the women too followed the styles in clothes and hair-dressing. Then, instead of a guitar, a concertina, and a fiddle, played by three half-castes, there was now a pianola; and, although lancers and waltzes had, as ever, a place on the programme, there were also the newer American dances. . . .

Nevertheless, it was still in the lancers that every one experienced the maximum of delight. Then the men whirled their partners right off their feet, and laughed loudly as the women shrieked; then they hilariously encroached into neighbouring sets, and played tricks with one another in the grand chain, and shouted out in chorus popular tunes.

By eleven o'clock such women as aspired to decency went home, but the scene in the schoolroom was now really jolly; and at the windows stood Kaffirs of all ages and sizes watching the revels of a holy victory.

Less than anything in Adam's Rest, during the eighteen years that stretched between the two dances, had the Kaffirs changed. They did not travel by motor-car, nor follow the latest fashion in clothes, nor dance the newest dances. They still walked barefoot to get from one place to another; they still wore such rags as they had until they dropped to pieces; and, on fine nights, they still danced their old dances to their old songs in their old sandy location where not a flower or tree stood to mark the finger of God; and then went hungry to bed, to sleep promiscuously on the ground in unclean, windowless huts, and to infect one another with unmentionable diseases.

CHAPTER X

§ 1

THE year 1918 made way for the year 1919, and still Miriam was living with the thought of Felix and returning to it, if ever the duties of the day demanded some mental excursion, as though it were the sorrowful home of her being. She remembered Felix as she had known him. She recapitulated his adventure into the war and visualised the bitter calamity of his death and tortured herself with the lost possibilities of his future. She entered into her thought of Felix as votaries enter a church.

And, to begin with, she did so as one come to do penance, wearing a spiritual hair-shirt, in fasting and lamentation. But one day, suddenly, she realised that she had been guided in by mechanical habit and was sitting in drowsy peace. She was not suffering.

The realisation shocked her. And so this was then, she told herself, the way with those who grieved! . . . For she was now forty-two, and she had learned in her life that, since the depths at which human beings differed from one another were superficial compared with the depths at which they were alike, she might not unjustly apply her discoveries about herself to the world at large. . . . And so, this, she pondered, was the way of Christians with their Christ; the way of nations with their heroes dead on battlefields; of widows; of bereaved parents and children.

She looked behind her and around her and saw that grief remained itself only where it was linked with a personal deprivation. Otherwise it faded. Otherwise it underwent a transfiguration and became some other form of soul matter: to the artist and religious, actually joy.

And children bereft of their parents, and even parents bereft of their children, if material loss were not part of their misfortune, found, after a while, that their lives went on as before. They were ashamed of this; and, sometimes, when a new calamity revived memory of the old, they thought, with a sad pride in their capacity to suffer, that they were still bleeding from the early wound. But they were wrong. It was the new wound that was spurting blood. The ancient was throbbing in sympathy, but it was only a scar.

And a widow, mourning her husband, thought, first, of his loneliness, his poor nothingness, under the earth, but afterwards she came to mourn her own loneliness, her own nothingness, above the earth.

And people, taking their own lives, did so not because of the death of loved ones: they could learn to bear that. What they could not learn to bear was the reduction through shame, sickness, frustration, impoverishment, of their own personality. . . .

§ 2

It seemed to Miriam that when Martin spoke of his son's death he was thinking, not so much of what Felix had lost in losing his own life, as of what he himself had lost in fulness of parentage who had once had three sons and now had only two.

At first Martin had spent his days recalling such scenes as those of Felix, so small then, running out to welcome him on his return home for the week-ends; of Felix crying: "Here's Daddy! Hallo, Daddy! Did you find anything this week, Daddy?" And, at the memory of his strong little body and moving little boy's voice, Martin had felt a hand ramming itself down his throat and reaching through the walls of his flesh to maul his heart.

But he had, for so many years now, dwelt away from his family, he had become so accustomed to his solitary existence, it really made little difference to his manner of living that Felix was gone. And, after a time, when he evoked the image of Felix, it did not hurt him so much. He used to sit on his heap of débris, watching the boys hauling up the great stones, and, in the middle of remembering Felix, he would think, with a despair which was more intimate to him than any memory, that he ought to have a new crane: there were diggers who had hundreds of pounds' worth of gear, only he, he, Martin Webster, had no luck and couldn't afford to replace his worn-out old machinery.

And he saw himself sitting here like this year after year, until he became a stiff-jointed old man who creaked when he moved like his own wretched "babies" and pulleys, and what had he had out of his life? One scrap of prosperity, long since dim in his memory, and three sons, of whom only two were left.

He had had three sons, and now he had two. It was what he was always saying.

Janet did not speak of her son as much as Martin did. What was going on in her mind? Miriam wondered. She had thought, once on a time, that Felix meant more to her than to any one else—even his mother—as if she and Felix had, in their seed, been companions in the body of some remote ancestor, one pushing into life, through an added layer of soil, a generation later.

Now she asked herself whether even such an affinity could be stronger than the link between mother and child. She could not find out from Janet. She felt she no longer understood Janet. They had never been alike: Janet accepting where she questioned; Janet taking where she sought; Janet hardening where she felt herself still fluid.

And did this encrustedness of Janet's keep out the suffering that so easily flowed into her own molten being? Or, in its hardness, did it actually admit more suffering by cracking beneath its burden?

No, she couldn't tell. They too seldom mentioned Felix to one another. They none of them, Felix's people in Adam's Rest, spoke much of Felix. It was partly a bitter shyness, partly a feeling that here was a sacred emotion that exposure would tarnish; partly the instinct, though not the wish, to bury a grief.

In the end, the instinct, which was an instinct to forget, rose above the other reasons for their silence. And, after a time, when they did not speak of Felix, it was chiefly because there seemed little to say; because the thought of him no longer roused them to passion; because, in short, the memory of him was fading from their minds. How often, Miriam thought, did respect for the dead not become like respect for the old, for the weak, for the accursed: only a cloak for embarrassment.

§ 3

But, indeed, Miriam could not, she found, communicate with any one as easily as she once had done. She felt like a world drawn off from the common sun of humanity by the pull of an evil star, and rushing through space alone, a thing of turmoil within itself but detached from all other spheres.

So her father had felt twenty and thirty and forty years ago, thinking to himself that the human beings that crossed his path had less meaning for him than the bricks that housed him, than the chair that eased his body, than the books that comforted his mind; thinking that each man, struggling in his loneliness with his soul against man and his body against God, was only a shadow to each other man. But it was only in flashes Miriam saw that this little old pale man had lived—still lived—an inner life that had its own urgent meaning. She never set herself solidly to realise what went on behind his faint, white-lipped smile, what he thought of the lonely days behind him, with what fear or courage or resistance or submission he was preparing to meet the inevitable end of all those days. She looked at him now with a pang, a sad realisation that she must be good to him for he would not much longer be there to receive any one's goodness. But the little common things of life kept rushing in between them, and she never adequately expressed her realisation, and it was his body, not his soul, she pitied.

She felt detached even from her husband. It sometimes seemed to her that her brain could not grasp her eyes' vision of him. She used to look at him and notice that his hair was thinner and greyer, his skin more lined and brown, that he tired sooner than he once had done. But why did not these things terribly hurt her? Was it only fancy, or did she nowadays even speak less to him than in earlier times?

She tried to recall her feelings towards him in the first years of their marriage. Had she loved him passionately then? Or was it all so far back that she could no longer even tell whether she had or not?

She thought that, on the whole, she had probably never in her life experienced this desire, this madding fever people called love—although she may have been on the fringe of it with Emery Maytham. She had taken Conrad gladly, contentedly, gratefully—with the knowledge that here was the right, even the predestined, sort of man for her. But the reckless emotion which Janet, for instance, had known for Martin, that had never been hers, nor would be now.

She remembered how Janet, at her very first meeting with Martin, had blazed forth on his behalf. How she had brushed them all aside and gone to dance with him among poor whites and drunken Tommies. How she had met him but once again, and, asking no questions, and indifferent to all cautions and consequences, had come back and told them in so strangely harsh and breathless a voice that she was going to marry Martin Webster.

Yes, Janet had known this thing ten thousand poets had sung. She had known love.

Still, that was nearly twenty years ago. And now, what of it? Did Janet look at poor thick Martin in these days of his degeneration with tenderer eyes for what had once been between them?

Not as far as Miriam could judge. Nor did others in like circumstances. They regarded with self-derision and self-contempt and self-pity the fallen object of a dead passion. Whether she analysed her disappointment or not, Martin's failure as a human being had made of Janet's young love for him nothing but an animal manifestation.

And yet, Miriam's mind went round and round, was it not this very animal manifestation that had rendered Janet a triumphant mother? Edmund the Bastard thought that children born outside the law were bound to have more composition and fierce quality than the sober offspring of convention. The Kaffir location on the hill did not prove it, whose huts were filled with the products of unresisted nature. But could one tell by such poor stock? Why was there this glow in Janet's sons that had never been lit in her own daughter? Had passion naught to do with that?

In these days the most frequent subject of conversation between Miriam and her husband was Isabel. As soon as the war was over they had sent Isabel to the school in Cape Town that Miriam and Janet had gone to thirty years ago. She had come home for her first holiday a girl suddenly developing into an early physical maturity. At fourteen Isabel was taller than her mother and could wear Miriam's clothes. But mentally she was child-like—not as backward as she once had been: her amiability, her ready acquiescence, her freedom from obstinacy even helped to conceal nowadays her essential slowness—still, with a mind that had not kept pace with her body.

Miriam used to gaze about Isabel's room and marvel at the interests of this young woman of a girl. On a couch in her room sat a row of large dolls, teddy-bears and things she called mascots. On the shelf above the couch were the books Miriam had given her, but none of her own choosing, and certainly none she had acquired herself. And this, to Miriam, made the books that were actually there look as impersonal as if they were dummies.

Isabel's conversation was about hockey and tennis and the girls and teachers she happened at the moment earnestly to adore, and it was weighed down with the expressions and mannerisms she copied from the currently adored ones.

"What will become of her?" Miriam often asked her husband.

"A very good wife and mother," Conrad answered.

"If some one marries her."

"Of course, some one will marry her. A pretty girl, who has a habit of agreeing with people, will always find a husband."

"But, in the meantime? I remember how I used to hate the idea of doing nothing but wait for some man to come along and make a woman of me. And now, after the war, the feeling about that sort of thing is even stronger. I don't think girls will ever settle down to the old emptiness again."

"Isabel isn't going to be an advanced girl," said Conrad.

"But she's imitative. She'll want to do as her friends are doing."

"Well, we needn't worry about that now. Isabel won't be through school for a long time yet."

That was only too clear.

Nevertheless, as time went on, Isabel's position at school remained by no means contemptible. At fifteen Isabel was the best sportswoman in the school—the best swimmer, runner, hockey-player, tennis-player. Her tennis, indeed, had passed above school-girl rank. She was playing in open competitions. Her school was proud of what Isabel could do on a tennis court. It was prouder of Isabel than of the girl at the head of the matriculation list. Who noticed the achievement of that matriculation girl except her parents and a few of her mates? But that Isabel was playing successfully in open tennis matches was a subject for comment in every newspaper in the country.

And, though Miriam tried to laugh at herself, she could not help it: she was moved to respect Isabel for what she could do on a tennis court. She, too, was proud of Isabel.

§ 4

She remembered how, years ago, Felix had so portentously said to her: "You take my word for it, she'll play a decent game one day." She had been amused at the solemn approbation. But now she saw that Isabel's tennis had really became a matter of importance, and might even, as these things counted, become a matter of national—yes, of international—importance. And not only to people who pursued a bit of rubber with a bit of wood and gut, but to solid middle-aged tax-payers, to artists, priests and politicians earnestly reading their newspapers at breakfast-tables.

The dear, preposterous world!

Now, when Isabel came home for the holidays, Miriam felt flattered if her daughter invited her to a game of tennis, and meekly accepted whatever advantage Isabel allowed her. And Janet's boys, Claude and Stanley, had reverentially to admit that Isabel was too good for them.

Stanley was still going to the Adam's Rest school, but Claude was at college at Cape Town. There had been no question, as with Felix, of whether Claude should or should not be sent to college by his uncle and aunt. They had sent him as a matter of course, as a matter of obligation. Felix's death had put certain things on a different plane. The war, too, had helped there. It had made the little old cautions seem contemptible, it had reduced the number of pros and cons in life.

Now, as time passed, and Isabel, sixteen, and Claude, nineteen, went off to Cape Town together, Miriam, looking at them, thought of things like love and marriage. She did not feel about Claude as she had felt about Felix, but she approved of him. He was a youth with a strong, solid body and a strong, solid mind. He was as imperturbably good-humoured as Martin in his young days, but he had a better brain than any Webster had ever possessed. He was even cleverer, though less eager and attractive, than Felix had been.

Could he care for Isabel? Miriam wished it. And his caring was the only consideration. Isabel would not, for her part, have temperamental qualms about marrying this or that man. She would accept a husband as simply as she accepted everything in life.

§ 5

But what Miriam could hardly help seeing was that Janet had not an equal enthusiasm for the idea. With a grim determination—the grimmer for Felix's death—to take all she could for her boys and ask no questions, Janet was allowing Miriam and her husband to send Claude to college. But that this involved an obligation on her part to hand her Claude over to them for their daughter (she put it to herself, as if she had the power to arrange it all) she did not admit.

To begin with, she had the feeling that Miriam had enough in life, it was an impertinence on her part to want also to absorb her son. And then, Felix's death had increased Janet's maternal jealousy. She could not bear the thought of giving Claude and Stanley up to any girls. And, least of all, could she bear the thought of giving Claude up to Isabel.

The very fact that she knew Isabel, and had known her all her life, made her quite abnormally undesirable as a daughter-in-law. For she could see in Isabel all those weaknesses mothers of sons look for in girls; she could never overcome her old-time contempt for Isabel's slowness, the expression of which had once parted her and Miriam for a year; she estimated her in the comparative way relations do estimate one another's children; and, when she remembered how inferior she had always thought Isabel to her own sons, she had an outraged feeling that for Isabel to win Claude would be nothing less than a getting the better of him—in short, cheating.

She knew she had this animosity towards Isabel, though why was not so clear to her, for she had not an analytical habit of mind. And she spoke very often, in a sort of general way, about how inadvisable it was for relations to marry one another. And she was always pointing out Isabel's deficiencies to her boys. And she could not be quite amiable about her even to Miriam and Conrad.

Miriam understood something of what was going on in Janet's mind. But pride prevented her from ever mentioning it, even to her husband, or from exhibiting the resentment that flooded her heart. Only she found she could not act otherwise than impersonally towards Claude. And when Conrad said Janet was becoming more and more embittered, she agreed with him, and left it at that.

CHAPTER XI

§ 1

What was she herself becoming? Or was it forever past now, her chance to become anything at all? How time was rushing on, a jumble of days and years, the days so long, the years so short.

It had been different in her youth. Then the days had been short and the years long. The days had been short because they never could hold as much as one wanted to bring into them, and the years long because they were stretched out by events and discoveries. Now the days were long because they were too long—there wasn't enough to fill them; and the years were short because the days were so like one another, there were so few that had any individual meaning, it hardly seemed as if the year had actually used up three hundred and sixty-five of them.

Miriam told her husband of this thought of hers.

"Poor old Miriam," he said. "It was, after all, wrong of me to settle down in Adam's Rest. You've wasted your life here."

"Still, who am I to complain?" Miriam asked. "What would I have had but for you? You didn't take me away from any grand man of the world. And it's not exactly Adam's Rest, Conrad. It's age. It wouldn't have made any difference where I'd lived. After a time there aren't enough new things coming in to keep one excited, that's the trouble."

"At least there'll be enough new things coming in while we're travelling," said Conrad.

The Hugos were talking a good deal about travelling in these days, for at last the endowment policy, that had always been destined to provide them with a holiday in Europe, was mature.

Miriam remembered how, at forty, she had longed for the five years to pass that lay before her going to Europe, and how, at the same time, she had dreaded their passing. She had even wondered whether there would be any eagerness, any desire for a single thing in the world, left in her at forty-five. What could one enjoy at forty-five, in the airless vestibule of decay?

Forty-five! It had always seemed to Miriam the worst age in the world. For when one was young one travelled in the morning, and when one was old one travelled in the night, and one could choose the appropriate wear for each. But in middle-age it was a journeying through both hot and cold, and a not knowing how to go clad, and a sweating and a shivering.

And here she was forty-five herself, and before her was this new experience of seeing the world. What meaning had it for her?

She began to make preparations for their travels in, it seemed to her, the calmest possible spirit. No, she told herself, excitement was past for her.

But, as the time for their departure approached, as they considered ships and cities, she began suddenly to feel as though she were going through a shadowed gorge at the end of which was open country. She used to wake up in the night and think how beautiful it was to know excitement again: not to be dead; dear world, not to be dead in life.

§ 2

Yet, even in her most exultant moments, she dared not yield herself altogether to happiness. Now the trouble was her father. He was so old and so frail. At any moment something might happen to him. Something? Ah, everything! She would never forgive herself, thought Miriam, if her father died while she was amusing herself there in Europe.

She went now to see him every day, and talked to him about world affairs, and the past of humanity and its future, and played chess with him, and accompanied him on his slow walks along the river banks.

And when they were together her sorrow for him was not so great as when they were apart. For he was firm mentally, and his attitude of tolerant acceptance eased her.

But, sometimes, they had barely said good-bye before she wanted to run back that she might hold over him the shelter of her strong maturity. Then she saw him standing palely at the edge of a great black emptiness, struggling to keep his hold with tired, slipping feet while a wind blew about him. And was he not dizzy at the prospect? And did he not fear the inevitable gust that would blow him over? How courageous he was. How courageous they all were, the old. Was it because the sense of life was stronger than the sense of death, and that maintained them? Or did they no longer care?

She felt herself moved every now and then to tell him that she hated to go away and leave him. She could not explain to him why. But, of course, he knew.

"Why, my dear Miriam," he once answered her, "I look forward to your holiday What could be better than that I should sit here comfortable in Adam's Rest and see the world through your eyes?"

"Father, you don't mean that really."

"Well, perhaps I don't. Still, are you to delay going to Europe till I die? I might take too long. And then, Miriam—" he paused a moment, choosing his words, "it is better for parents to leave their children sorry that they did not do more for them, than resentful because they did too much. You are not to say again you don't want to leave me."

§ 3

It was not, however, until a year after the endowment policy had matured that the Hugos set out for Europe. Dr. Hugo had sometimes, in years gone by, remarked that there was no necessity for them to wait for the maturing of the policy. They had other money. But first they had not wanted to leave Isabel; and then the war had come; and after that it had seemed they might as well wait now until Isabel had done with school and take her with them; and, finally, the policy had always been earmarked for this purpose: they never really, in their hearts, supposed they would use any other means to go.

Now they had delayed this additional year that Isabel might be a little older—eighteen—before they took her to England and left her there to qualify as a games mistress.

Miriam found it hard to realise in the daughter who accompanied them on board the young woman Isabel had become—so hard that it made her more shy of Isabel than of any one else in the world. She could not give her advice or instruction; she could not confide in her or ask for her confidence. As she never now saw her body, so she also never now saw her mind.

Quite often, when Miriam was animatedly talking with people on the ship and Isabel joined the gathering, she would feel a constraint that suddenly silenced her. And it was with diffidence she approached a group in which Isabel was pleasantly disporting herself.

For, to her glad amazement, Isabel did now pleasantly disport herself. What had become of the dough-like child? Well, Isabel had never been brilliant, and never could be, but she had developed an easy self-confidence, a poise, through her conquering career on tennis courts that gave her quite a social quality. Isabel had no nerves. Her stolidity that had once maddened Miriam was now considered her greatest asset: an admirable steadiness. The whole country took pride in Isabel's magnificent imperturbability in tennis tournaments. "You can't rattle Isabel Hugo!" And she smiled without glee when she won, and, on the rare occasions when she lost, without sorrow. She was considered a great sportswoman.

It had all given Isabel that manner which the assurance of their position induces in even the stupidest of Royalties. Every one on the ship soon knew that Isabel was the representative tennis-player, and how unspoilt she was, they said.

For, though she could beat all the men at deck-games, and some man or other was always looking for her to make a fourth, she seemed equally pleased to play with the beginners and derelicts whom other good players tried to avoid. She used to search them out in her kind, comforting way. "Oh, you'll get into it quite soon. I've only just learnt the thing myself."

And if, in company, she wasn't exactly animated, she was, at least, unaffected, pleasant, composed, a listener. And pretty. Isabel was decidedly pretty.

She had lost her adolescent lumpiness and had now the figure of a young Juno. She had shining yellow hair, steadfast, honest blue eyes, a fresh colour, a lovely rounded chin. Miriam used to look at Isabel's chin, and think an older woman would need much charm to compete with that. It gave her a pang of pleasure to look at Isabel's gracious youth.

It also, sometimes, by contrast, gave her a pang of pain. She was forty-six, and she should not have compared her neck with the neck of a young girl. But she could not accustom herself to this irresistible physical degeneration. She felt as if the forces within her were a weak team in a tug of war against the forces of time. She might strain and strain, but she was slipping steadily, losing ground steadily. Soon she would be losing it with a rush, and, over the line, breathless, falling, she would be drawn.

Now, in the evenings, when the band played on deck, young men, and older men too, would come up to Isabel where she sat beside her father and mother, and ask her to dance with them. They seldom asked Miriam to do so. She recognised that this was right, but it was with a stiff smile she accepted the rare, too polite invitation. On the return voyage, she decided, she would declare immediately that she did not dance, and not find herself, at least, in this false position.

Sometimes, when she was dancing with her husband, she would look at the other middle-aged women dancing with their husbands, and think to herself what a boon marriage was to women. There they were, the poor women, not beautiful, not brilliant, not wealthy, not wise, not even kind and charitable, and, of right, they had the name, protection, loyalty, support and status of the men who, in these days, when no one else wanted them, were still here, not forsaking them even in the little things. Thank God, Miriam cried in her heart, for the institution of marriage. And, later, in their cabin, she would embrace her husband with a vehement gratitude that humbled him because it had, for a reason he could not imagine, a sort of religious quality.

And when these same women spoke to one another of their feelings for men and the feelings of men for them, she would look at them partly in sorrow and partly in contempt: thinking of their delusions and their scanty hopes; thinking how little they appreciated their matrimonial good fortune and that yet this good fortune was an indignity; thinking, too, when she saw them eagerly accepting a scrap of extra-marital male devotion, how tragically little they were now prepared to take compared with what they had, in their youth, by nature's amused dispensation, commanded.

§ 4

It was with a full recognition of these things, a deliberate, determined remembering of them, that Miriam admitted to herself there was a man on the ship who seemed to have a particular interest in her. Walter Mellamy had attached himself to the Hugos as a family on the second day out. But, although he sat with Conrad in the smoking-room, and played games and danced and walked the deck with Isabel, he spent most of his time with Miriam.

She enjoyed this interest of his without prejudice, judicially placing it as an interest that was not sexual, though it was also not the interest which would have existed between a man and a man or a woman and a woman. For, after all, she was forty-six, and endlessly conscious of the fact, and he was thirty-seven. Perhaps it was true that he found her, as he said, stimulating. He had never, he arrogantly added, cared to talk to any woman who was not intelligent.

Miriam wondered what, in these circumstances, he found to say to Isabel.

He used to sit on the deck beside Isabel after lunch, while Miriam was in her cabin, resting. Sometimes, when Miriam came up for tea, she would find them still there, each silently in a deck-chair, with a book. Walter would be reading either a scientific work or a detective story. Isabel would be reading whatever the library steward recommended to her. For Isabel had not even the taste to have bad taste in books—she lacked the passion for a preference. No, she simply hadn't any taste at all. She was quite prepared to read a first-rate author. Indeed, she had read many first-rate authors, Miriam had seen to that. Only here the trouble was that she would speak of them amiably in the same breath, and on exactly the same terms, as the tenth-rate authors. It used to madden Miriam. Nor was Isabel awed into thinking good what she could not understand—she hadn't the imagination. Nor did it occur to her to proclaim a predilection for the sake of creating an impression—she was too guileless.

No, really, it was strange for Miriam to see Walter Mellamy and her daughter together.

For he certainly had a brain. He was a biologist who did research work in London, and his special field was the social behaviour of animals. He had just been visiting South Africa to study the social behaviour of monkeys.

Miriam had never before met a person so lacking in reticence. There was not a thing he ever hesitated to tell her about himself, or to ask her about herself. He discussed his own conduct, or the conduct of any one else, with as impartial a scientific concern as he discussed the conduct of his monkeys. Everything animal delighted him. He loved insects and he loved men from the same animal standpoint.

Sometimes he embarrassed Miriam, and sometimes he angered her, but he never failed profoundly to engage her attention.

One day, for instance, he asked her coolly how much she loved her daughter.

"Why do you want to know that?" she demanded uneasily.

"You seem more detached than most mothers."

"You think so?"

"Am I wrong?"

She could not call him impertinent: she had for over a week now allowed him to exercise his curiosity, and he had thus, as it were, established a right of way across her field of thought. Yet she did not answer him directly.

"Do you want me to admit myself an unnatural mother?"

"Love has nothing to do with nature."

"But surely mother-love is an instinct."

"I don't think so."

"Animals love their young."

"I wouldn't call it love."

"I'm not saying the fathers, but the mothers."

"They tend them at a certain stage. No more than that. Even a monkey abandons her young when, as an Indian politician once said to me, she leaves off milking them, when, in short, she is no longer driven by her own physical necessity. Is a temporary feeling like this, physiologically conditioned, what we mean by love? And, as for the father monkey, he makes wives of his daughters and kicks out his sons as soon as they are likely to become his rivals. How do you like that?"

"But human beings——" said Miriam.

"Yes, we are different, in a way. We have parental love. But it's a social development, not an instinct. It has something to do with our monogamous institutions."

He looked at Isabel, where she was playing deck-tennis. "But, to come back to Isabel, why don't you love Isabel as much as you would like to?"

She could not but answer him. She could not resist his easy frankness.

"I do now. At least I—well, I'm happier about her now."

"Why weren't you happy about her before?"

"She wasn't a clever child, Mr. Mellamy, and I was jealous because my sister had three clever sons."

He realised that she found it hard so to reveal herself, but he continued.

"And to-day she has other qualities that make cleverness seem unimportant, is that it?"

"Perhaps."

"She's beautiful and popular?"

Miriam spoke with some surprise.

"Beautiful, would you say? Actually beautiful?"

"She's gloriously built. A real woman. The bones of her face are splendid."

Miriam watched her daughter in silence. So people thought Isabel beautiful? And she had under-estimated her? She felt happy and ashamed.

"And, you see," went on Walter Mellamy, "no one cares now if she was a clever child or came first in class or anything like that. No one ever will, and certainly not the man who is destined to marry her. I wouldn't if I were that man."

Miriam's heart gave a bound. She looked at him. He met her eyes with an amused smile.

"As a matter of fact, Isabel is the sort of woman I generally fall in love with," he added genially. "One does fall in love with types, doesn't one? I suppose I'm attracted by big, placid women because I'm thin and jumpy myself."

She could not decide whether he was serious or not. She hadn't the opportunity to find out. For, just at that moment Isabel herself approached them.

He got up from his chair, and suggested a drink. Miriam did not want one. "Then," he said, "Isabel and I will go to the lounge and come back presently."

Miriam sat staring at them. She sat staring in the same direction even after they had disappeared from her view. And what she found herself thinking was that if she, Miriam, had been a young woman Walter Mellamy would not have felt himself attracted by her, since he liked the big, placid type. He would have preferred Isabel to her.

Well, she was not a young woman. And why should she care whether this man, or any other man, was attracted by her or not? Why could she not be purely delighted because an intelligent man found Isabel desirable?

But she did care. It was no use putting herself rhetorical questions. She felt fundamentally injured. She had the realisation, for the first time, that not only was it meaningless—was it nothing—for a man to want to talk with a woman if he was sexually attracted by quite another kind of woman, it was actually an insult.

She twisted her thoughts away from herself, and tried to concentrate them entirely on Isabel and Walter. She could not do so. She rose from her chair and went to the upper deck and walked up and down there solitarily, staring at the lacy foam that fringed the ship. And she thought was she a bad woman as well as a bad mother, or were all women shamefully like that?

§ 5

She did not know whether Walter and Isabel came back, after their drink, to where she had been sitting. They certainly did not go in search of her. And it was not until two days later that she found herself again alone with Walter Mellamy, and back to the question of his sexual predilections.

She asked him then if his liking for big, placid women was the irresistible instinct to keep the race balanced.

He smiled at her. "Instinct again! Sexual love among human beings isn't an irresistible instinct any more than parental love."

Miriam looked at him, surprised. She had assumed he was the sort of brutal realist who would roundly declare sex was at the root of everything.

She told him so, and he laughed.

"Oh, it's an instinct all right. Only not an irresistible instinct. We're brain before we're sex. We don't love unless we choose. Why do people marry more or less appropriately within their generation and class and so forth? Because they love as their minds instruct them. Otherwise we'd behave like dogs. That's irresistible instinct."

It seemed reasonable. She admitted it to him. "In fact, you're altogether a reasonable person," she said.

"I'm glad you think so," he answered. "Reasonableness is the best quality there is." He smiled at her companionably. "Do see that you have a reasonable son-in-law one day."

What did he mean?

She laughed shortly, and tried uneasily to find another subject for conversation.

Her embarrassment amused him. He always, she told herself with sudden resentment, seemed to get a sort of amusement out of her. Was he serious with Isabel? With Isabel, and not with her?

He ignored her change of topic.

"You're very young for your years, you know," he said.

Later in the day she asked her husband how he would like Walter Mellamy for a son-in-law.

He did not answer her at once.

"Would you?" she insisted.

"But he's twice her age!"

Her husband did not think Walter good enough for Isabel! The things she was learning about men! And was he mad, or was she?

"Still, he's not old," she pointed out. "Would you?"

"Like Mellamy for a son-in-law? But Isabel's a child. You're joking, Miriam."

"Perhaps I am," she said. "I really don't know."

§ 6

The days went on and nothing more was spoken about the matter. Walter Mellamy still sat in the smoking-room with Dr. Hugo, and played with Isabel, and talked with Miriam.

Yet, curiously, as if there had been enough said at last to satisfy even his unreserved spirit, he and Miriam were no longer as frank with one another as they once had been. And then she began to notice that he was not so eager for her company, that he spent more time with Isabel, and, indeed, with Dr. Hugo.

And did this mean, she asked herself, that a man had the impulse to cast off women in general when he became interested in a woman in particular? She could not now doubt that where Walter had once preferred her company to Isabel's, he now preferred Isabel's to hers. Was she jealous?

It was an ugly question to ask herself. And still uglier to have to admit that perhaps she was—or, if not jealous, at least, humiliated. She could not—no, she could not—accustom herself to the discovery that Isabel's fresh youth was worth more in a woman than all those qualities in which she herself was superior to Isabel. And what amazed her still more was that she was considering the situation, not as Conrad's wife and Isabel's mother, but simply as a woman. She was utterly ashamed of herself.

Then another phase came. She began to despise Walter for being attracted by Isabel. He could not be so intelligent after all! And still another phase when she suddenly found the whole business rather amusing.

Nevertheless, when, the day before they were due to reach England, Conrad said to her: "Well, Miriam, it was no joke. He wants to marry Isabel," what she did astonished even herself: She put her head against her husband's breast, and could not restrain her weeping.

And she was not weeping because she was sorry or glad on her own behalf. She was weeping simply in the old-fashioned way because her daughter, her child, was involved in this most emotional affair of loving, and being loved by, a man.

CHAPTER XII

§ 1

Well, as Walter told them at once, it was all very handy. They could travel about with Isabel, and buy her whatever trousseau they thought she needed, and then, before they were due to return to South Africa, the wedding could take place, and everything would be settled.

And so it fell out. To some extent it spoilt their holiday—the rushing about to buy Isabel a trousseau and help her select a house and furniture. But, as time went on, Miriam began to feel a sense of authentic maternal triumph in Isabel's matrimonial achievement. And what she found herself thinking of chiefly was Adam's Rest. Here they were in great Europe, and she thought of Adam's Rest! So much, her mind ran, for the people who had always considered Isabel dull! So much for Janet and her Claude! So much, even, for the Crofts! The Crofts were down in the world in these days, but they were woven into Miriam's conception of Adam's Rest. She could not think of Adam's Rest without thinking of them.

When it came to saying good-bye to Isabel, Conrad was more moved than Miriam. "Well, we haven't had much of our daughter," he said wistfully. And he was rather quiet and downcast throughout the homeward voyage.

They arrived at Cape Town to find Claude, still at college in Cape Town, waving to them from among the waiting crowd on the dock. Then they went to look for letters and telegrams. The very first letter Miriam read was from Aunt Laura. "My dear," it began.

There was something wrong with such an opening. Never before had Aunt Laura addressed her otherwise than as "Dear Miriam."

"My dear," the letter said. "We have been wondering whether to let our bad news meet you in Cape Town or to wait until you arrive back home. We have decided that, on the whole, it will be better for you to get it before you see us again.

"My dear, your father died two months ago of heart failure. He asked us not to let you know while you were on your holiday, he didn't want to spoil things for you. He asked us to tell you he was feeling very tired, and wanted the rest. He said he wished to thank you for being a good daughter to him. He hadn't great pain.

"I don't know what else to write you. I am here still in the old house. I let the Kaffir girl sleep inside instead of in the yard room. I am quite well. The rest of us are all well."

Miriam handed the letter to her husband in silence. He looked into her face, and said: "Would you like to go down to the cabin?"

She nodded, and they went down, twisting their way among people busy with their passports, their letters, their luggage and their customs returns. In the cabin they faced one another, and then Conrad put his arms round her and made her sit down beside him on the couch. "He was the best man I ever knew, Miriam. I am glad he had you for a daughter."

At his words tight-coiled emotion unwound itself in her as if released by a spring. Oh, Conrad. Oh, Conrad," she sobbed. "I wasn't good enough to him. I always meant to be better. And I never was. I've never been good enough to anybody."

"No daughter could have done more for him than you did, Miriam."

"I can't think of Adam's Rest without him. I can't feel he isn't there."

She saw his small, thin body, his pale-lipped smile, the heavy book he was always carrying about. She saw him in whatever direction she thought of Adam's Rest. She remembered how, just before they had gone to Europe, he had told her it was better for parents to leave their children sorry they had not done more for them than resentful because they had done too much. He had justified his theory. . . .

Presently Claude, allowed on board at last, found them. He found them as he had expected to find them. He kissed Miriam awkwardly, and shook hands with Conrad, and asked how Isabel was, and stood then, in silence, not knowing what to say.

Conrad handed him Aunt Laura's letter. "Can you tell us more than this?" he asked him.

Claude read it. "Not much more. I haven't been home since. But he was looking pretty bad when I was there last. He was getting very weak."

"He was never a strong man," commented Conrad. "It was always a wonder to me that he lasted so long. He wouldn't have anywhere else than in Adam's Rest.

People live long in places like Adam's Rest. Well, Claude," he added, "and how are things with you? Busy with the exams?"

"Yes, I'm working fairly hard."

Felix, and the examination he had failed, flashed through Miriam's mind. Claude would not fail any examination. He wasn't the sort that failed. . . .

Claude was looking at his wrist-watch. "You know, I think you ought to be going," he said. "People were beginning to leave the ship as I came on."

Miriam stood up. Her husband smoothed the hair from her forehead, and kissed her. She faintly smiled at him.

§ 2

Aunt Laura, Janet, Martin and Stanley came to meet them at Adam's Rest station. London and Adam's Rest. The crowds in London that went and were replaced, and went and were replaced, and this little group of four people—her life—in Adam's Rest. And yet, there, as here, it was all just, thought Miriam, one person. No human being could love more, hate more, enjoy more, suffer more than it was in the capacity of one human being to love, hate, enjoy and suffer. What, then, was the total of it all but the soul of one person?

But there was something so lonely and sorrowful in the little group that she had expected to hold five, and that held only four, something so cut-off and desolate. Even Stanley, only eighteen years old, seemed to partake of this quality of dereliction. His features had suddenly grown too big for his boy's face. His nose was red and peeling. He was spotty. His eyes had the questing loneliness of adolescence. And Aunt Laura, on the contrary, seemed to have shrunken, and her face had gotten paler and thinner, and her hair noticeably greyer, so that her scar and her too-large eye, with its red turned-back lower lid, stood out more sadly than ever it had done before.

And Martin, stout as he was, and dressed for the occasion, looked a failure: there was an uneasy jauntiness in his bearing that was worse than Janet's unhidden defeat.

Miriam had thought, on her way across the sea, how she would boast to Janet about Isabel's husband and house and trousseau—because Janet had once despised Isabel as a possible wife for her Claude (the comparison: Claude and Walter!). But how terribly far away she was now from wanting to triumph over this shabby woman, her sister.

She remembered the pretty, pleasure-loving girl Janet had been. Life she had always demanded.

And Life she had got. Life it was that had worn her so. Heavy lines clamped her drooping mouth—which drooped the more for the missing teeth she had not troubled to replace. Her face was set, and her figure was set, and both face and figure were heavy, but they were not round. Her hair was plentiful and strong still, and not very grey, but it was dull and lank. Without being untidy, Janet yet had an air of neglect—as if she were a disused lay figure pushed aside, with other unknown derelict things, into a corner of an old store-room.

There was something shy and shoddy about all of them.

Miriam felt as though she wanted to do and do things for these poor fleshly belongings of hers.

They none of them spoke of Mr. Lincoln. Martin and Stanley went off with Conrad to see to the luggage in the van. "We've got your car outside," said Aunt Laura. "Stanley drove it up."

They walked down the platform. Behind the little station house Adam's Rest looked just as it had looked when Miriam and Janet had set out for school over thirty years ago. Only then their father had been here. And now he was not here. And under a few lonely Wacht-een-bietje trees there stood no longer a Cape cart, its horses very still, with heads almost touching the ground, and a little Kaffir on the seat, loosely holding the drooping reins, but Dr. Hugo's shabby motor-car.

§ 3

Miriam unpacked their boxes; and distributed the presents they had brought; and was told that Janet's share of what little her father had left had immediately been swallowed up by old debts; and insisted that Aunt Laura should now live with her; and in a few days it was as if she had never been away. Berlin, London—she might just have read about them or heard about them. She could not feel them. All she could feel was Adam's Rest. The Road wiped out Unter den Linden, and The Street, Piccadilly.

She had not been home two days before she was in Redford's Store, assisted, as twenty years ago, by Freddie Croft, obsequiously ingratiating where he had once been boldly ingratiating. And next night they all, Miriam and Conrad and Aunt Laura and Janet and Claude (but not Martin, for he was back in Baboon's Gully), went to the cinema in the school-room.

At the cinema they saw Susie Maxwell and Carrie Lowe with her daughter Maudie, and the three of them came up, one after the other, and coloured or not coloured, with a sort of diffident insistence on their ancient rights, shook hands with Miriam and Conrad, and enquired what Europe was like and were they glad to be home again. "Yes, very glad," said Miriam, because it was too much trouble to say anything else. And she asked Susie how Frances was getting on.

"Frances is married again," said Susie, but without elation.

And then they all returned to their seats, Maudie throwing Stanley a slantwise look from her yellow eyes, which he overtly ignored.

"What sort of man has Frances married?" Miriam asked Janet.

"A widower with grown-up children. A digger, but they say he has a bit of money. She was glad to get the home. She's had a hard time since Emery Maytham died."

"Poor Frances," said Miriam. "She was always the best of them. Lovely I used to think her too. And Maudie, still the same thing?"

Janet nodded. "Yes. Still the same thing. Any man. She's just come back from Kimberley. They say she had a child there. I don't know."

The pianola began, and the picture came on. They settled themselves back in their seats.

CHAPTER XIII

§ 1

FORTY-SEVEN Miriam became, forty-eight, forty-nine. It had been harder, Miriam found, to be thirty-nine than to be forty-nine. Now life was running down so steadily, so irresistibly, that the going was smooth.

On her fiftieth birthday her husband said: "Well, my dear, do we mention it?"

"Yes. After this anything can be mentioned," said Miriam.

A year later they took one of the year-end excursions that were now running to England, to see Isabel and her babies.

They found Isabel as placidly and agreeably earnest as ever, a serious mother, an acquiescent wife, an absorbed housekeeper. Now she was married she was little different from any other domesticated woman.

And they found Walter a most settled husband and father. And, although his face was still thin, and he was still thin generally, he had put on weight round his middle.

What, however, struck Miriam chiefly was the fact that she no longer found him surprisingly brilliant. Why? she wondered. Had he changed, or had she?

She put it to her husband.

"You place him too low now because you placed him too high then. Walter is an able enough fellow, but what impressed you about him at the beginning was his newness, his way of talk, and so forth. You hadn't experienced it in Adam's Rest. I remember the first time I went overseas myself, how overwhelmed I was by the smartness of the other men. And then I found that their smartness was just a sort of community affair. Everybody in that group had it. It ran from one to the other. It's the same when you get older, and you are startled by the knowledge of the young, and you think what have you gained with all those years you've had, and they haven't. You feel humiliated. You think: 'My God, what won't they be at my age, if they already understand more than I do?'

"Then you find that they know only other people's knowledge—after all, where should they have got their own?—but that what you know you've largely won for yourself. And so you regain a little of your self-esteem. Your father had more in him than Walter, Miriam."

They spent five weeks in England, and came back on another excursion ship that carried holiday-makers from England to South Africa. The English holiday-makers were agreeable people, resembling not at all the comic tourists of conventional caricature, and they asked Miriam to play tennis and dance, but she always refused. "I'm getting too old for these things," she said. "I've got two grandchildren, you know."

It hurt her when she said she was too old, and the gallant comment was, invariably, that no one would believe she was a grandmother, and, besides, what, in this year of 1930, did she mean by speaking of age? There was no such thing any longer. But she knew better.

It was a hot day in February when they returned home to Adam's Rest. They arrived in the morning, and the same afternoon Miriam walked down The Street towards Janet's house. The roofs of corrugated iron glistened on both sides of The Street; the trees threw barely a shadow; and, descending from the sky, and, ascending from the earth, the passionate glare and the quivering heat met and embraced. And up The Street, coming towards her, Miriam saw a figure strange in Adam's Rest. A tall, very slender figure it was, and dressed in black.

Miriam was about to pass, wondering who this newcomer to Adam's Rest might be, when she realised it was Frances—Frances Maxwell, as she still thought of her.

They stopped face to face, and, as Miriam silently held out her hand, tears came into Frances' eyes, and ran down her cheeks.

Miriam remembered how, on just such a hot summer's day as this, she had come upon Frances wheeling a perambulator down this same street. Frances had been a beautiful child then, in a bright pink gingham dress and sunbonnet, illuminating the whole scene with her sudden note of colour. Under the hood of the perambulator she was wheeling Felix had lain asleep. Felix! For years he had been but a shadow in Miriam's memory, and here she saw him again.

And now another shadow joined them, and came alive. Emery Maytham. And now another. Her father. There grew a confusion in Miriam's mind of Felix and Frances and Emery Maytham and her father. She felt a tightness in her heart that pained her physically. She shook her head as though to tell Frances she had not the power to speak.

They stood so for a while, the two women, in silence. And then Miriam asked Frances when she had come to Adam's Rest.

"Only two days ago," said Frances.

"Walk a little way with me," said Miriam, "and tell me about yourself."

She did not realise it, but it was the first time she had asked a Croft to walk with her.

Frances spoke in her slow, monotonous voice.

"It's been a hard life," she said. "First there was Emery. He was always sick. He used to cough and cough and cough—blood, Mrs. Hugo. I knew he couldn't get over it. Sometimes he knew it himself, but other times he wouldn't believe it. He used to say if only he could get to England he would be all right again. He was talking like that just a month before the end, when he wasn't able to stand even."

"But it would have been winter in England then, wouldn't it? Didn't he die just after the Armistice?"

"Yes, I know. But that was what he wanted—the cold. He said it was this heat here that was eating him up. He got the idea into his head that the cold would make him feel strong."

Miriam thought of the Englishman dying in the close heat of a South African December. She could understand his yearning for an English frost.

"Did he hear from his relations?" she asked.

Frances hesitated a moment. "I don't know. He never spoke about them to me. And I don't think he even told them he was married."

They walked a few steps in silence. Then Frances spoke again.

"We were badly off, too. Emery had to give up working, and what he got from his fund wasn't enough to keep us going. I did a little mending for some bachelors, but that was only a couple of pounds a month. And there was a lot of extra expense on account of Emery's sickness." She drew a long sigh that ended on a broken quiver. "I never thought, when I left Adam's Rest, what I should have to go through."

Miriam looked at her. How old could Frances be now? Thirty-four? Thirty-five? She looked a woman deep-sunk in middle-age. Her eyes were beautiful still, but she was lined and hollow-cheeked and sharp-chinned. Her neck was thin, and, because it was thin, much browner than it once had been. She had got browner altogether—she was just a worn-out coloured woman now. Even her features seemed different. What a triumph it had been for her to marry Emery Maytham—and that had been the end of it!

"So what did you do then?" Miriam asked her. "I mean, after he died?"

"I was a widow for five years. Then I married a man who was good to me, but he was old—nearer sixty than fifty. I didn't care for him much, but what could I do, Mrs. Hugo? I couldn't go on like that, never making enough to keep myself, and I didn't want to be the same as Maudie Lowe. And I was nearly thirty by that time. I had to take the best I could. But even he was unlucky. From the time we got married he never seemed to do anything at the digging. All the money he had went back into the ground. Now he's dead too."

"Your second husband? Poor Frances! Yes, you have had a hard life."

Unconsciously she spoke as if Frances' life at thirty-five were over.

"Have you any children?" she asked.

Frances shook her head.

"I've nothing," she said. "I've come back to Adam's Rest."

Presently she added that she was going to look after old Mrs. Croft now, who was so full of rheumatism she couldn't move.

They were almost at Janet's home. "I am going in here," said Miriam. "Come and see me sometimes, won't you, Frances?"

Even through her misery, the old tradition was still strong enough in Frances to make the invitation an important thing to her.

"Thank you, Mrs. Hugo," she said shyly. . . . "There is something I have to give you," she added after a moment. "Emery asked me to give it to you when he—just before the end. I always thought I'd bring it along if ever I came to Adam's Rest. Then I forgot all about it. I found it the other day when I was packing up after my second husband died. It's a picture Emery painted. It took him a long time to do. All the while he was too sick to go to work, he was painting it. Then, when he got very bad, he couldn't paint any more, and so the picture isn't quite finished. That was what he said: he said it wasn't finished. But the meaning was clear, he said. I don't know what meaning. I don't understand about such things myself."

Miriam could almost have smiled. Emery and his pictures. Poor Emery!

§ 2

Frances brought Miriam the picture a few days later—a rolled-up canvas. Miriam opened it out: it was a river-scene with a figure in the foreground, and it was a little worse, if anything, than Emery's usual work. They looked at it together, the two women, and then Miriam thanked Frances, and put Emery's bequest aside.

Later, after Frances had gone, she looked at the picture again. And, as she looked, realisation came to her.

She went out into her garden and saw before her eyes the river-scene Emery had tried to reproduce from his memory of it. She recognised the two isolated trees and the rocks in the river that, even at flood-time, jutted above the water. And there—yes, with the figure on it—there was the old bent bough that had always been Miriam's river-seat. How often, while Emery was reading to her, had she sat on that bough. And now it came back to her mind that he had once broken short in his reading and said something to her. . . .

She looked at the picture again with eyes that saw at last. The picture which resembled no living thing—it represented herself. He had said to her then: "I wish to Heaven I could paint you as you are now."

"Why?" she had asked.

"You look—fateful," he had answered, after a little hesitation.

So here he had painted a woman with her hands crossed in her lap, looking out into the distance. He had sent the picture to her, and he had sent it as a symbol. A symbol of what? Fate? Who was to know? Emery had always been a romantic.

§ 3

She turned back to the rondavels. The sound of loud talking reached her ears. The Kaffir woman who came weekly to roast the coffee beans was conversing in the usual native shout with the cook. Miriam remembered that she had to tell the woman something—she had burnt the coffee beans again last week. She walked towards the yard. Before a great open wood fire squatted the witch-like figure of an old native woman. She wore a dingy shawl, largely patterned, and a rusty black headcloth. Her feet were bare. Over the fire stood a big black tripod Kaffir-pot, and the old woman was stirring the coffee in it with a stick.

"He might have painted this instead as Fate," thought Miriam.

She looked again at the canvas in her hand, thinking sadly, and with self-contempt, what little she had effected in the world. Then, thinking so, she rolled it up and thrust it among the burning logs under the Kaffir-pot. It did not burn at once. She watched it for a little while.

Presently she spoke to the old Kaffir woman. "Annie," she said, "the coffee was burnt again last week. You must look after it better to-day."

The smell of burning paint and canvas was mingling now with the aromatic smell of roasting coffee. Miriam saw that the roll had caught fire at last. She looked at it a moment longer. Then she turned away and walked back to her rondavels.

THE END